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The Hockey News

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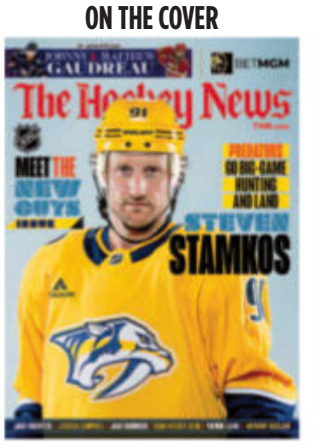

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TAKING TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

STEVEN ELLIS/THE HOCKEY NEWS

THIS WAS A COLUMN I did not rush to write. Typically, when a big news story breaks, I jot down my thoughts as quickly as possible, stream-of-consciousness with some structure thrown in. But faced with the tragic deaths of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, I knew I had to take a few days before I could get things right.

Like anyone else, I mourned the loss of two brothers who meant so much to so many people. But I immediately realized I was going to focus on what made the Gaudreaus so special. We will, of course, commiserate on losing them, but we will also celebrate the lives they lived. (In this issue, we'll do so with Ken Campbell's feature starting on pg. 26.)

Amazingly enough, social media turned out to be a healing salve in those first couple of days. My timeline was filled with stories of how the brothers impacted everyone around them, from teammates to organizations to fans.

By virtue of his NHL stardom, most of us know more about Johnny, but it was easy to learn about Matthew by reading testimonials from those who knew him in USHL Omaha or at Boston College and beyond. He was the kind of person who welcomed everybody in a room, and if you were a new teammate – or even someone just on a tryout – he would make you feel comfortable.

As for Johnny, the love that the hockey world felt for him was evident in every anecdote that was shared. Some teammates told stories about his notoriously picky eating habits, but there were also incredible photos of him interacting with fans (in one case, the guy delivering food to his house) and simply enjoying life on and off the ice.

When I think about Johnny, the first thing that comes to mind is the 2015 All-Star Game weekend in Columbus. He was still with the Calgary Flames at the time, but when he signed as a free agent with the Blue Jackets years later, I couldn't help but wonder how much his love for the Ohio capital had come from those festivities. He was a rookie NHLer at the event, but he showed right off the hop that he was willing to have fun and show off his personality. This came to the forefront during the skills competition's breakaway challenge. Ryan Johansen, a star with the hometown Jackets at the time, used the trainer's seven-year-old son as a prop in one of his attempts, carrying the kid down the ice while the little one attempted to stickhandle the puck. When it was time for former Columbus winger Jakub Voracek to go, the then-Philadelphia Flyers rep grabbed the famously diminutive Gaudreau, who gamely played the role of Johansen's little boy on their own breakaway attempt. Needless to say, the crowd went wild.

Even before that, I had seen Gaudreau's star power when he helped Team USA win gold at the 2013 World Junior Championship in Ufa, Russia. On a team featuring big prospect names such as John Gibson, Alex Galchenyuk and Seth Jones, Gaudreau did more than his part in securing the title for the Americans. And the ease with which he did it only confirmed that size would not be an issue for him at the NHL level. This kid was going places.

It's going to be a hard year in Columbus. They close the pre-season with back-to-back games against one of Gaudreau's best friends, Pittsburgh's Kevin Hayes, and they host a marquee Stadium Series game against Detroit in March. But it's fitting that we'll be reminded about Johnny and Matthew throughout the campaign. After all, they were unforgettable people.

Ryan Kennedy
Editor in chief
𝕏 **@THNRyanKennedy**

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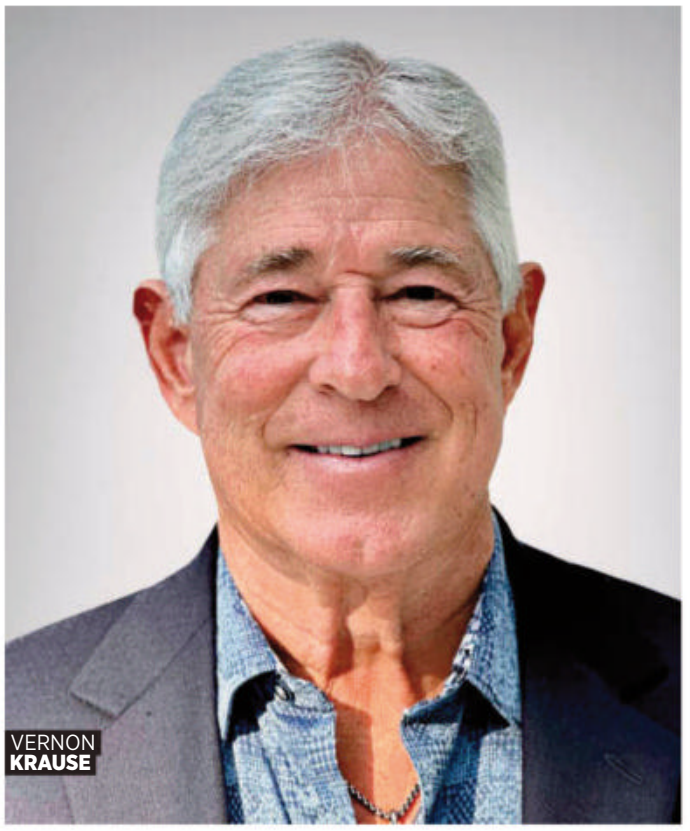

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Meet The New Georgia Hockey Guy

THIS ISSUE, MEET THE New Guys, is where we feature some of the new players on their new NHL teams and provide some analysis of what difference they might make in their teams' chase for the Cup.

Drawing on this theme, I would like you to meet the new guy, a former season-ticket holder for the Atlanta Thrashers, who, in my opinion, will make the difference in bringing the NHL back to Georgia. Vernon Krause is a successful businessman who owns dozens of car dealerships and other investments, but that is not what defines Vernon as a true success. First and foremost, he is successful because he is a dedicated family man who is religious and extremely generous.

Vernon and I have a mutual friend who called me up this summer and said that he had spoken to Vernon about me. With Vernon's growing interest in the game of hockey and my lifelong passion for the game, I was on my way to Georgia to meet another hockey guy. When I arrived at his office, the walls were filled with autographed pictures from all sports, but the one that stuck out for me was of Mario Lemieux. On the table was a signed jersey from Bobby Orr that was just being measured for a frame.

I spent a couple of days in Alpharetta, Ga., talking with Vernon about everything about hockey, which included his real-estate development called "The Gathering at South Forsyth." This development project includes a spectacular multi-purpose arena for numerous events, shows and, yes, it could house an NHL team. As many of you know, my first attempt at pursuing an NHL team and developing an arena was in 1989, so I have been around this space for 35 years, in which time I have seen dozens of arenas get designed and many of them built. In these 35 years, I have never seen anyone as excited and prepared as Vernon is to get the NHL back to Georgia.

To demonstrate his seriousness, over the past two years, he went out and bought up several adjacent parcels of land that now make up more than 100 acres right along Georgia State Route 400 with on-ramps and off-ramps on either end. He hired the renowned SCI and BBB architects, who have decades of experience designing and upgrading NHL arenas and have surpassed themselves on the new Georgia arena. He has done all of this without any assurance, nod or wink from the NHL that they even want to expand.

Vernon is a diehard Georgia Bulldogs football fan as well as a big golfer and tennis player. He loves these sports, but when he met Bobby Orr for dinner a few years ago, he, just like the rest of us would (and I have and still do), got weak in the knees knowing he was with hockey royalty. Although he was always a fan of hockey, it was meetings with Orr starting three years ago that lit the Flames (I got it in there) in Vernon's entrepreneurial spirit to grow the grassroots game of hockey in his community and inspired him to lead the charge to bring the NHL back to Georgia. Thanks, No. 4, for your lifelong support of growing the game we all love.

Vernon would be the first to tell you that all of his success comes from the support of his family and from the spiritual part of his life. I had the opportunity to have dinner with his family, which has to take place around a very large table. I purposely took the seat beside his partner in life, his wife, Marie, because I always know where the real power lies in any family or organization. Now you know my secret of success.

Marie and Vernon are the 1-2 punch of a champion, in that without either one, you simply will never win a belt. But these two have recently taken a brutal punch where the bruises still show and will never fade away, as they lost their daughter Angela in 2015 to cancer. The only way that they get through the day without Angie is from the love of their other daughter, Jennifer, and their sons, Zachary and Matthew, along with the love from their many grandchildren.

In memory of Angie, their family foundation has funded the construction and operation of a building that serves as a kitchen behind a church in Atlanta to help feed those in need. Naturally, it is called "Angie's Kitchen."

Knowing that I have owned and still own companies that have built, supplied systems and operated hundreds of community ice rinks around the world, he asked me if I would help the Krause Family Foundation explore the opportunity of building one or more community ice rinks in their community in the future. He said that during these past two years, he has fallen in love with the game of hockey and, at the same time, saw the need for more community ice rinks to serve the current needs of local families as well as the future growth of the game.

I told Vernon I have reached a point in my life that I have the luxury to decide what I want to do with my time and with whom I want to spend it, so I accepted the invitation to work with the Krause family on exploring the opportunity to build one or more community ice rinks. I did so because even though there is currently no path to an NHL team returning to Georgia, this guy wants to grow the grassroots game of hockey in Georgia, and who in their right mind wouldn't want to help him succeed in this inspiring endeavor. I'm all in on Vernon Krause's vision for growing hockey in Georgia, and so should everyone who loves the game. H

W. Graeme Roustan
Executive Chairman & Publisher, Roustan Media Ltd.
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BOB FRID-USA TODAY SPORTS

NHL

THE GR8 GOAL WATCH

Ovechkin's slow start last season raised some doubts, but after a second-half surge, the only question is whether Ovi will break the all-time goal mark this campaign or next **BY JARED CLINTON**

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN the time in early February when Alex Ovechkin, from his office atop the left-wing circle, hammered a carbon-copy one-timer past Sergei Bobrovsky. Or perhaps it was Ovechkin's two-goal game against the New Jersey Devils near the end of the same month. For the skeptic, maybe it took until the slick deke he tucked home – his second marker of a pair of tallies and eighth in five games – against the Winnipeg Jets in late March. But at some point, the conversation surrounding 'The Great Eight' and his pursuit of Wayne Gretzky's NHL record of 894 goals transformed from a question of "if" to one of "when."

Make no mistake, there were doubts through a significant portion of last season, almost entirely spurred by Ovechkin's eight-goal production through 40 games. It took a whiplash-inducing turnaround in the second half, which saw the Washington Capitals captain pot 23 goals in the final 39 games of the season, to erase those concerns. And now, all that stands between Ovech-

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An all-time celebration is within Ovechkin's grasp as he takes aim on the NHL goal record.

USA TODAY SPORTS

BIG SHOT
Gretzky has been the NHL's career goal leader since passing Howe's mark of 801 in 1994.

kin and the all-time mark is 41 goals – or 42 if you're counting the tally that will give him sole possession of No. 1 on the list.

Thus, we enter the coming campaign considering not his ability to catch and ultimately surpass Gretzky but whether he can do so this season.

To some, it seems inconceivable that Ovechkin, on the cusp of his 39th birthday, will manage to hit that mark in 2024-25. This is despite the fact he scored as many – and exactly as many – just two years ago. Invariably, those with doubts will point to the first half of last season. Fair enough. It is, however, worth noting just how jarringly unlucky one of the greatest shooters of his or any generation was when some were writing off his pursuit of the NHL's all-time goal mark.

Entering last season, Ovi owned a career 12.9 shooting percentage. But as the goal droughts added up during the beginning of the campaign – including one painful 14-game goalless stretch, unsurprisingly the longest of his career – Ovechkin watched his success rate plummet. Prior to scoring his ninth goal last season, when the worm started to turn, Ovechkin had a pedestrian 5.4 shooting percentage. At the time, it was the second-lowest rate among any forward with at least 100 shots. But much like water, goal-scorers have a tendency to find level, and Ovechkin shot 18.4 percent over the final 36 games. In that span, he had the NHL's fifth-best shooting percentage. This is to say that, if given his chances, even an aged Ovechkin is bankable to convert the way he always has.

Maybe, then, it's the fact those chances have been slowly disappearing that should be the real cause for concern.

Though the decline hasn't been incremental, the trend over the past several seasons is evident: Ovechkin is getting fewer pucks on net each season. Three of his five lowest-volume shooting seasons, as measured by shots per game, have come in the past four years, and last season saw his lowest mark yet, as Ovechkin averaged 3.44 shots per game. And this isn't a matter of being an inch wide here or there. Ovechkin's 7.66 shot attempts per game last season were the second-fewest in his NHL career. Here's where it should be noted he's not scored 40-plus goals in any season in which he's averaged fewer than four shots or 7.9 shot attempts per game.

There is, however, the matter of the power play, where Ovechkin can be at his lethal best and perhaps feast en route to the record. He tied for 14th last season with 13 power-play goals, and his 18.2 shots per 60 minutes ranked 15th among skaters to play at least 50 minutes on the man advantage. But even there lies some worry.

Last season, power-play chances somewhat dried up for Ovechkin – not because he wasn't the focal point of the power play, which he was and will remain, but because Washington struggled to generate chances. The Capitals had the fourth-fewest power plays last season, perhaps unsurprising given Washington was among the league's weakest possession teams. If that trend continues, it will limit one of Ovechkin's greatest goal sources.

Much of this, though, disregards improvements made around Ovechkin, as the Capitals had among the most transformative off-seasons of any team in the league. The roster was bolstered by the additions of blueliners Jakob Chychrun and Matt Roy, while Andrew Mangiapane and Pierre-Luc Dubois can be impact players up front. A deeper, deadlier lineup can juice the power play, tilt the ice in the Caps' favor with greater frequency and add a dash of playmaking from which Ovechkin can benefit. That said, it likewise excludes myriad factors beyond his control, positive and negative, such as health, ice time, empty-net opportunities and more.

ALL THAT STANDS BETWEEN OVECHKIN **AND THE ALL-TIME RECORD IS 41 GOALS**

But if it's all a matter of will he or won't he, the safer bet appears to lie on the latter – at least in the season ahead. Because while the all-time mark might be all semantics for some, as Ovechkin is already considered in some corners the greatest goal-scorer the league has ever seen, it does appear only a matter of time before a new record-holder is crowned.

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Behind the MASK

LOGAN THOMPSON | WASHINGTON CAPITALS

WE'RE NOT SURE ABOUT Logan Thompson's credentials as a history buff, but perhaps he was heeding the words of Abraham Lincoln – "Don't say, 'If I can.' Say, 'I will.' " – when he sought to prove himself as a true-blue contender for a starting gig in the NHL. Thompson's ambition led to him requesting a trade and subsequently landing in Washington, where the Lincoln Memorial's iconic statue of 'Honest Abe' has become a key feature on the back panel of the 27-year-old's first Capitals mask. Designed and painted by Friedesigns' Dave Fried, who has worked with Thompson since he was with the WHL's Brandon Wheat Kings, the new lid embraces the themes of the U.S. capital, incorporating the Capitol Building and a bald eagle, which likewise acts as an homage to his new club's alternate logo. **– JARED CLINTON**

Jersey HOUND

TAHOE KNIGHT MONSTERS | 2024-25

YOU HAVE TO HAND it to the new Tahoe Knight Monsters – they're coming into the ECHL *strong*.

Sure, they could've created one crest and used it on both white and dark jerseys, but the Knight Monsters kicked it up a notch with three distinct sweaters right off the hop. First off, the dragon mascot looks great, particularly on the gold edition. The mountains on the other two are a nice local nod, and there are multiple cool shoulder logos to gaze upon as well. It's a great color scheme, and the fact Tahoe is carrying on the Vegas Golden Knights name lineage – they're an affiliate – is a nice touch. Let's face it: they were never gonna be the 'Bronze Knights.' **– RYAN KENNEDY**

MASK: DAVE FRIED/FRIEDESIGNS.COM; JERSEY: PHOTOS BY TAHOE KNIGHT MONSTERS

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LAST CHANCE-O-METER

Despite seven trips to the conference final and two to the NHL's championship series, Joe Pavelski ended his career without a Stanley Cup. As Pavelski hangs 'em up, which other vets on expiring deals could be facing their last shot at glory? **BY JARED CLINTON**

A RYAN SHAME

> RYAN SUTER
AGE: 39 / GP: 1,444
Though never a Norris Trophy winner, Suter was among the NHL's best defenders for more than a decade. Yet, he's never seen a single Cup final. No team can be written off before puck drop, but a deadline move to a top contender seems possible.

BURNS-ING DESIRE

> BRENT BURNS
AGE: 39 / GP: 1,415
Half man, half beard, but zero Cups. Burns was a centerpiece on one Cup finalist and two other conference finalists. He'll feature on a Canes outfit that feels it has a lot to prove. He'll turn 40 before the playoffs begin, though. The clock is ticking.

GOING OIL IN

> DEREK RYAN
AGE: 37 / GP: 570
The late-bloomer took a circuitous path to the NHL before carving out a big-league career as a valuable bottom-six and penalty-kill contributor. He was a bit player during Edmonton's run to the Cup final last season and hopes to repeat the feat – this time, with a different result.

PETRY WISH

> JEFF PETRY
AGE: 36 / GP: 937
Petry's contributions have been underrated, as he ranks 30th in scoring among defensemen since 2010-11. For that, he's been rewarded with...48 career playoff games. The Red Wings will push for the post-season, but Petry's role is diminishing, and he'll turn 37 before season's end.

CAM DO ATTITUDE

> CAM ATKINSON
AGE: 35 / GP: 770
His career was already threatened by injury, and Atkinson's time as a legitimate 25-goal scorer appears to be behind him. He's on a one-year deal in Tampa Bay and will have a shot as the Lightning attempt a last-gasp run before their window closes.

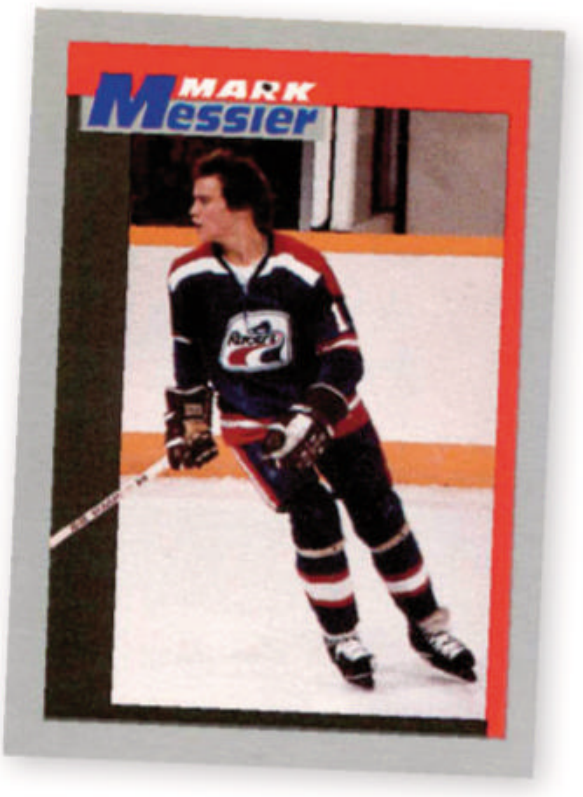
YOU CAN GIROUX IT

> CLAUDE GIROUX
AGE: 36 / GP: 1,182
This comes down to his desire to chase a Cup. Like Pavelski, Giroux is still a consistent contributor but is battling the wear and tear that comes with age. His 37th birthday is around the corner. It could be all or nothing this season.

SUTER: SERGEI BELSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS; BURNS: DAVID KIROUAC-USA TODAY SPORTS; RYAN+ATKINSON: PERRY NELSON-USA TODAY SPORTS; PETRY: DAN HAMILTON-USA TODAY SPORTS; GIROUX: MARC DESROSIERS-USA TODAY SPORTS

In the CARDS

WAYNE GRETZKY AND MARK Messier started their pro careers with the WHA's Indianapolis Racers as a pair of 17-year-old rookies, though at different times during the 1978-79 season. But their respective stays with Indianapolis were short-lived. The Racers folded mid-season, and no card company bothered to make WHA cards in '78-79. So, as cool as it would have been, no official cards of Gretzky or Messier with the Racers were made that season. However, a card of 'The Great One' with the Racers was later issued as a part of the 1982-83 Neilson's Chocolate set, which consisted of 50 cards chronicling Gretzky's career. A decade later, during the 1992-93 season, Enor – a company that made card supplies, such as pages and albums – released a 10-card set recapping Messier's career and featured a card of 'Moose' during his limited stint in Indy. **– SAL BARRY**



THE COUNTDOWN

OLDEST ARENAS

As they enter Year 4, the Kraken are still relatively new to the NHL scene. But Seattle's arena – or at least its bones – has been around since the early 1960s **BY JARED CLINTON**

WHEN GROUND WAS broken in late July on the future site of Calgary's Scotia Place, it marked the slow march toward the Flames' exit from the Saddledome, the franchise's home for more than four decades.

Over time, the rink has become synonymous with the Flames. The Saddledome has seen three Stanley Cup finals, one Stanley Cup victory and housed Hall of Famers such as Jarome Iginla, Lanny McDonald and Al MacInnis, along with countless club and cult heroes.

As much as the Flames' greats and the team's success aided in the lionization of the Saddledome, however, it was the building's uniqueness that contributed most to its legend. In an era of glass-and-steel monoliths and cookie-cutter construction, the Flames' home cut one of the most iconic silhouettes among NHL arenas past or present. Strangely, while its saddle shape was congruent with Calgary's cowpoke culture, it wasn't designed with that theme in mind. Lead architect Barry Graham told the *Calgary Herald* in 2008 that it was wholly unintentional.

Perhaps that's what makes the building all the more special; it was something the franchise and Calgarians made their own. That may be why there's nostalgia about the shuttering of one of the league's oldest arenas. Thankfully, two truly old barns will still stand.

1 SEATTLE KRAKEN

CLIMATE PLEDGE ARENA (APRIL 21, 1962)

It underwent a $1.15-billion renovation, but the roof and exterior were originally built for the 1962 World's Fair.

2 NEW YORK RANGERS

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN (FEB. 11, 1968)

The World's Most Famous Arena is a sporting Mecca. Major upgrades in 1991 and 2013 have kept it a world-class barn.

3 CALGARY FLAMES

SCOTIABANK SADDLEDOME (OCT. 15, 1983)

A hub during the 1988 Olympics, the iconic Saddledome will remain the Flames' home for three more seasons.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

4 UTAH HOCKEY CLUB

DELTA CENTER (OCT. 9, 1991)

The newest NHL team's home hosted the 2002 Olympics and will welcome the world's best athletes again in 2034.

5 ANAHEIM DUCKS

HONDA CENTER (JUNE 17, 1993)

Before Honda had the naming rights, the Ducks' arena was the best-billed in the game: Arrowhead Pond of Anaheim.

6 SAN JOSE SHARKS

SAP CENTER AT SAN JOSE (SEPT. 7, 1993)

If you build it, they will come: the arena passed a public vote in 1988, and San Jose reeled in an NHL franchise in 1991.

7 CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

UNITED CENTER (AUG. 18, 1994)

The 'Madhouse on Madison' was built with capturing the magic – and noise – of the old Chicago Stadium in mind.

8 ST. LOUIS BLUES

ENTERPRISE CENTER (OCT. 8, 1994)

Before the Blues' building stood on the grounds, the location was site of the historic Booker T. Washington Theater.

9 VANCOUVER CANUCKS

ROGERS ARENA (SEPT. 21, 1995)

Three years of upgrades have given the former 'Garage' new life. NBA expansion in 1995 helped the arena get built.

10 BOSTON BRUINS

TD GARDEN (SEPT. 30, 1995)

Decades in the making, this Garden came to fruition after threats of – gasp – moving the Bruins out of Boston.

11 OTTAWA SENATORS

CANADIAN TIRE CENTRE (JAN. 15, 1996)

How much longer will the Sens play at their current rink? The odyssey for a new home has had many twists and turns.

12 MONTREAL CANADIENS

BELL CENTRE (MARCH 16, 1996)

Banners hang from the rafters, but none from the Bell Centre era. The Habs won the 1993 Cup before construction began.

MSG: BRAD PENNER-USA TODAY SPORTS

SCOTIABANK ARENA

13 PHILADELPHIA FLYERS

WELLS FARGO CENTER (AUG. 12, 1996)

Location, location, location: the Flyers' modern-day rink was built on the same grounds as the original Spectrum.

14 BUFFALO SABRES

KEYBANK CENTER (SEPT. 21, 1996)

The site of the Sabres' longtime arena was initially pitched as an ideal spot for an indoor NFL and MLB stadium.

15 TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING

AMALIE ARENA (OCT. 12, 1996)

It took some time for the Bolts to get a real home. They spent four years at Expo Hall and present-day Tropicana Field.

16 NASHVILLE PREDATORS

BRIDGESTONE ARENA (DEC. 18, 1996)

Located near Music Row, the Predators' building has hosted the country music awards annually since the early 2000s.

17 WASHINGTON CAPITALS

CAPITAL ONE ARENA (DEC. 2, 1997)

A $515-million facelift is coming – but only after threats were made to move the Caps down the road to Virginia.

18 FLORIDA PANTHERS

AMERANT BANK ARENA (OCT. 3, 1998)

The biggest indoor arena in Florida will be rocking this year after a Stanley Cup brought waves of new Cats fans aboard.

19 TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

SCOTIABANK ARENA (FEB. 19, 1999)

Maple Leaflets? The Toronto Postal Delivery Building stood here in 1941 before conversion to a world-class arena.

20 COLORADO AVALANCHE

BALL ARENA (OCT. 1, 1999)

Talk about a banner run. All three tenants – Avs, NBA Nuggets and NLL Mammoth – won titles from 2022 to 2023.

21 LOS ANGELES KINGS

CRYPTO.COM ARENA (OCT. 17, 1999)

The Forum featured Marcel Dionne and Wayne Gretzky, but the best years in Kings history are tied to the "new" barn.

22 CAROLINA HURRICANES

PNC ARENA (OCT. 29, 1999)

Other arenas opened with events, but the Canes cut the ribbon in Raleigh. Unfortunately, Game 1 was a 4-2 loss.

23 COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

NATIONWIDE ARENA (SEPT. 9, 2000)

Only one playoff-round win here, but the Jackets completed their historic sweep of Tampa Bay in 2019 at Nationwide.

24 MINNESOTA WILD

XCEL ENERGY CENTER (SEPT. 29, 2000)

Building a state-of-the-art arena was among the factors that paved the way for NHL's return to the State of Hockey.

25 DALLAS STARS

AMERICAN AIRLINES CENTER (JULY 17, 2001)

No playoff hardware here: Dallas' lone Cup win came in 1999, and the 2020 conference crown was in the bubble.

26 WINNIPEG JETS

CANADA LIFE CENTRE (NOV. 16, 2004)

The NHL's smallest arena can be among its loudest when packed to the rafters. The AHL Moose were the first tenant.

27 NEW JERSEY DEVILS

PRUDENTIAL CENTER (OCT. 25, 2007)

'The Rock' was the first new arena built in the New York metro area since the Devils' prior home, Meadowlands Arena.

28 PITTSBURGH PENGUINS

PPG PAINTS ARENA (AUG. 18, 2010)

Mario Lemieux has been the Pens' hero many times, including playing a starring role in getting the team new digs.

29 VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS

T-MOBILE ARENA (APRIL 6, 2016)

Eighteen months before the Knights hit the ice, The Killers and Wayne Newton were the arena's opening acts.

30 EDMONTON OILERS

ROGERS PLACE (SEPT. 8, 2016)

The move to Rogers Place coincided with the Oilers snapping an 11-year playoff drought. Is the title drought next?

T-MOBILE ARENA

31 DETROIT RED WINGS

LITTLE CAESARS ARENA (SEPT. 5, 2017)

Comerica Park and Ford Field also share a slice of downtown, but, at nearly $900 million, 'LCA' is the crown jewel.

32 NEW YORK ISLANDERS

UBS ARENA (NOV. 20, 2021)

Finally in a new home, the Isles can dream of building a dynasty like the one they established at Nassau Coliseum.

SCOTIABANK ARENA: JOHN E. SOKOLOWSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS; T-MOBILE ARENA: GARY A. VASQUEZ-USA TODAY SPORTS

Puck CULTURE

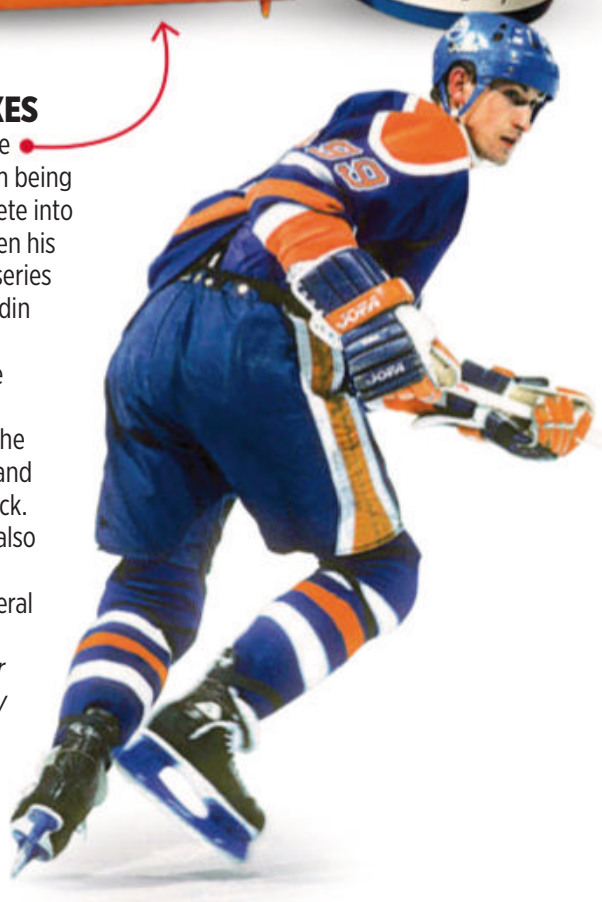
FIVE OFFBEAT GRETZKY COLLECTIBLES

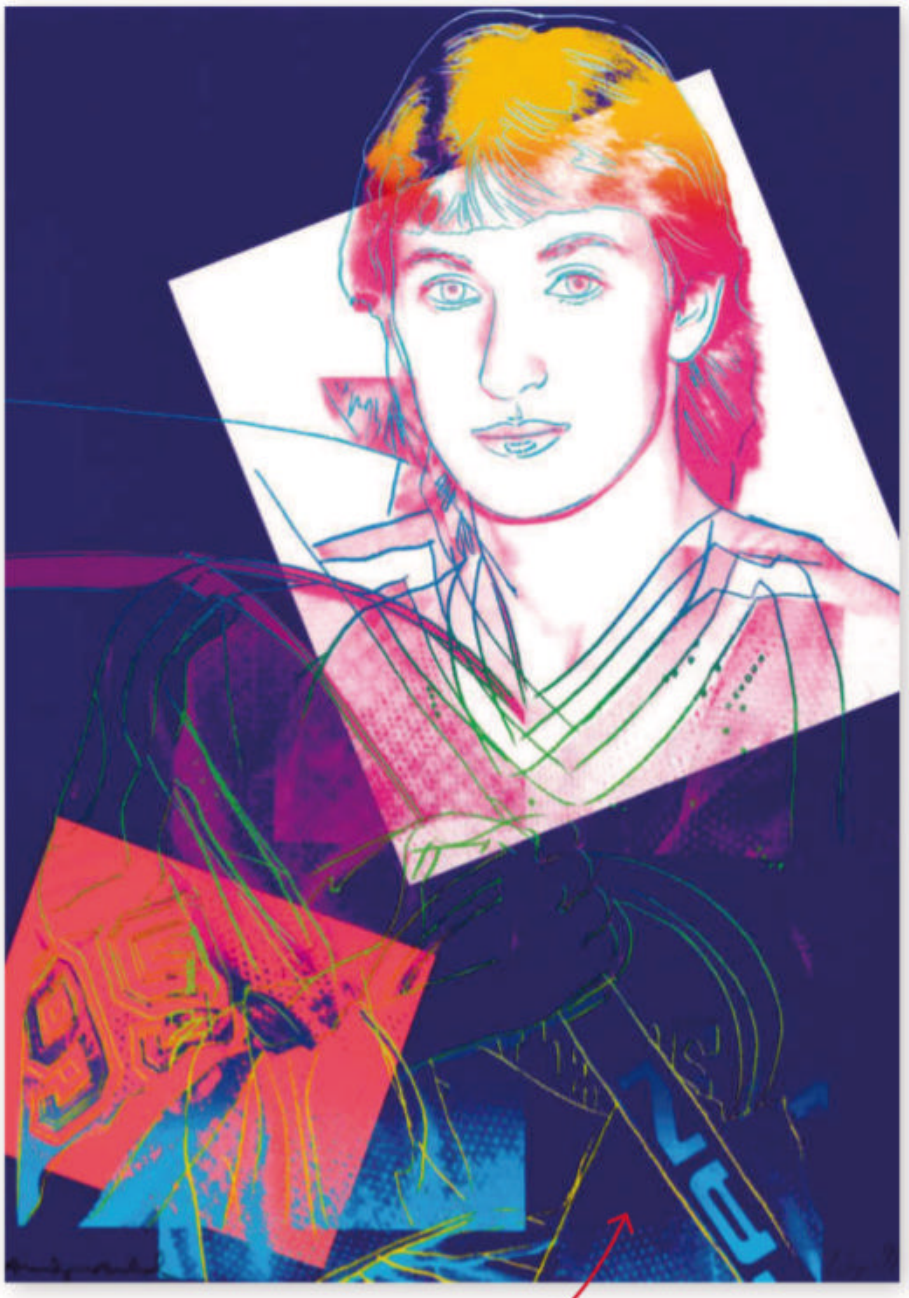
Wayne Gretzky's rise to cultural-icon status saw him featured on some rather unconventional items over the years, from Andy Warhol portraits to street-hockey shoes **BY SAL BARRY**

DURING HIS 20-YEAR NHL career, Wayne Gretzky transcended being a sports superstar to become a cultural icon. This was reflected in the many collectibles featuring his name and likeness. Here are five of the more offbeat items of 'The Great One.'

1 > LUNCHBOXES

Gretzky may have transformed from being just another athlete into being a pop-culture icon when his likeness first appeared on a series of lunchboxes made by Aladdin Industries in the early 1980s. The plastic, blue-and-orange lunchbox featured a painted portrait of Gretzky, without the Oilers logo, flashing a smile and wielding his famous Titan stick. A large facsimile autograph also adorns the lunchbox, which included a thermos with several comic-style illustrations of Gretzky. Amid the sea of *Star Wars*, *Smurfs* and *Strawberry Shortcake* lunchboxes in school cafeterias in the '80s, this brightly colored lunchbox of 'The Great One' stood out.





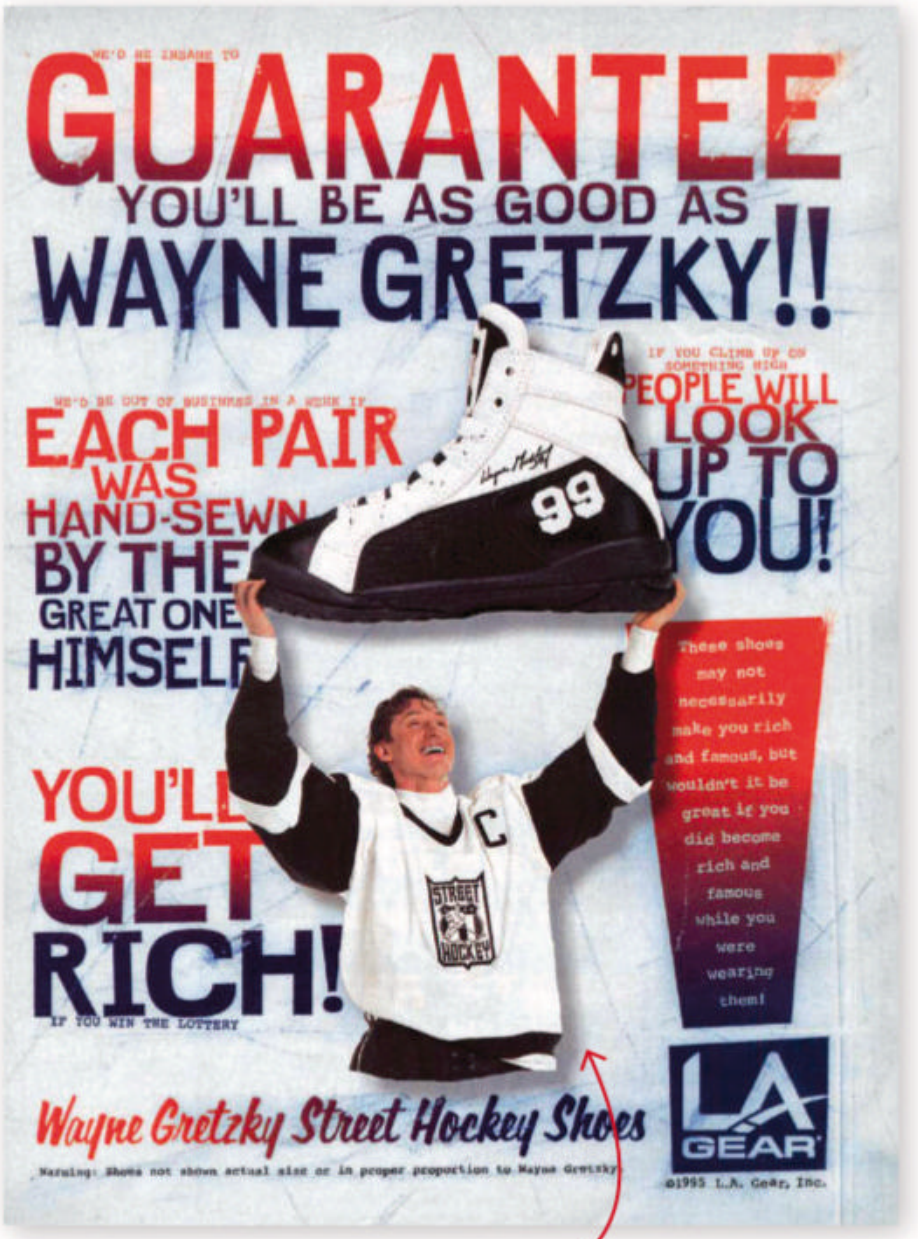
2 > POP ART PORTRAIT

Famous pop artist Andy Warhol created numerous portraits of celebrities, actors and athletes, including Gretzky. The two met for a photo shoot in 1983, with Warhol later using the photos to create a series of six paintings unveiled in 1984. One painting was then reprinted as a series of 300 screen prints, entitled *Wayne Gretzky #99 (F&S II.306)*, and measuring 32 inches wide by 40 inches tall. "It was an incredible crossover between two very famous individuals, arguably the most famous within their respective trades," said Rob Cowley, president of Cowley Abbott Auctions, based in Toronto. "People know Warhol's images globally, and Gretzky is one of Canada's most renowned individuals, even outside of sports. And the two admired each other despite being in two completely different fields." In May, a copy of the screen print – numbered 51 of 300 and signed by Gretzky – was sold by Cowley Abbott Auctions for $33,600, which, according to Cowley, was one of the highest prices achieved for the print.

WARHOL PRINT: PHOTO BY COWLEY ABBOTT AUCTIONS; LUNCHBOX: PHOTO BY SHERI LARSON; GRETZKY: DICK RAPHAEL-USA TODAY SPORTS

3 > GAME CARD

Gretzky has been pictured on more than 12,000 trading cards, but one unique card that has flown under the radar isn't even a hockey card – it's a card from a game called *Face to Face: The Famous Face Guessing Game*. Released in 1991 by Canada Games, *Face to Face* was a deck of 800 cards that had a black-and-white portrait photo of a famous person – such as a musician, politician, actor or athlete – on the front. Gretzky is card No. 580 in the set. "This is not a normal sports card in the traditional sense," said Chris Ivy, director of sports auctions at Heritage Auctions. "This was part of a game, so they were made to be played with." Hence, not many of these cards are in great condition when they do surface. A copy of the Gretzky *Face to Face* card graded as an 8 (Near Mint) by PSA sold by Heritage Auctions in May for $3,840 – which is more valuable than 99 percent of Gretzky's hockey cards issued during that decade.



4 > STREET HOCKEY SHOES

As ice hockey became more popular in the U.S. due to Gretzky's trade to Los Angeles in 1988, so too did street hockey. To capitalize on the interest, shoe company LA Gear marketed a line of street-hockey shoes endorsed by Gretzky, with his autograph and famous No. 99 stitched on the sides. One style of the shoes was all black, like an old-school hockey boot, while the other was black and white, akin to a more modern skate. The shoe's packaging referred to the sole as the "Tar Blade," while the tongue and ankle of the shoe had added padding for protection. To further push the hockey-skate motif, white skate laces with black hashmarks (a.k.a. traces) were used to tie up the shoes. A humorous print ad made outlandish boasts in large text, with smaller text debunking those claims. To date, Gretzky is the only athlete to endorse hockey skates, roller skates, in-line skates, golf shoes and street-hockey shoes.

5 > FASHION DOLL

A decade before Starting Lineup hockey figures hit toy stores, Gretzky was first immortalized in plastic by Mattel in 1983 with his own fashion doll. Yes, a *doll* – as it is called on the box – and not an action figure. Really, it was just a doll of Barbie's boyfriend, Ken, but with Gretzky's head and wearing hockey gear. The Gretzky doll came clad in a white Oilers home uniform, with a stick, skates and gloves, but sadly no Jofa helmet. Mattel also released a few additional outfits, sold separately, for the Gretzky doll: a blue Oilers uniform for road games, a gray track suit for staying in shape, and a tuxedo for when you wanted to take lil' Wayne to his next NHL awards ceremony.

CARD: PHOTO BY HERITAGE AUCTIONS; GRETZKY 1: ROBERT HANASHIRO/USA TODAY NETWORK; DOLL: PHOTOS BY SAL BARRY; GRETZKY 2: USA TODAY SPORTS; XXXX

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NHL

PRIMED FOR WHAT'S TO COME

The two-year deal between streaming giant Amazon and Canadian broadcaster Rogers could be a look into the future of how fans consume hockey **BY KEN CAMPBELL**

BEGINNING THIS SEASON, hockey fans in Canada will be able to stream reruns of *Two and a Half Men* to go with their too many men and get their fill of Andy Samberg to go along with Dylan Samberg. And really, where else could you find both Mr. Bean, the bumbling Brit, and Jake Bean, who signed a two-year deal with the Calgary Flames over the summer?

But as is the case with anything in this day and age, it's going to cost you. As importantly, though, the sublicensing deal that was struck between Rogers and Amazon Prime to give the streaming service exclusive rights to at least 26 Monday night games over each of the next two seasons will go a long way toward determining how the TV landscape will look in Canada when Rogers' 12-year, $5.23-billion (all figures in Canadian funds) national-broadcast deal expires after 2025-26.

And if this is any kind of harbinger, it's almost certain that landscape will be a more fragmented one. It's hard to fathom the NHL would get the kind of money it received a decade ago from Rogers while dealing with just one entity. In many ways, this will be a trial run to see what appetite Canadians have for paying for a streaming service in addition to cable fees for the national package. Those who don't want to miss any games will have to fork out an additional $9.99 per month – or $99 per year (plus tax).

For Rogers, it's not only a chance to recoup some money from its NHL deal – which, it's believed, will cost $500 million each of the next two seasons – there's also an *if you can't beat 'em, join 'em* aspect to it. "This is very important," said Jonah Sigel, an industry observer and the owner of YYZ Sports Media. "And I think how successful it is over the next two years is very important. It's really important for the league this be successful, and Amazon is the right streaming partner to get this started. A lot of eyes are going to be on it. The uncertainty of who is going to have the rights in two years is intriguing. There's a void, and someone is going to get some portion of, if not the entire, streaming rights. Amazon has the capability to do that."

So why would Rogers enter a deal that, in some ways, would seem to hasten its demise as a national provider? For a couple of reasons. First, while the value of the deal has not been disclosed, Ampere Analysis, a London-based data-and-analytics firm, estimated the deal to be worth about $3.52 million per game, which would put it at about $91.5 million per year. If Rogers is paying $500 million, getting almost 20 percent of that back – plus not having to pay to produce those games – will help the bottom line. And if things are going in this direction anyway, Rogers is an internet provider too, and somebody must supply the means for streamers such as Amazon to distribute their products.

As far as the actual games are concerned, it appears Amazon will be sparing no expense. The crew for each game will be on-site, meaning there will be no studio. And the NHL has provided good games. The Toronto Maple Leafs, of course, lead the way with six appearances on *Prime Monday Night Hockey*, followed by the Montreal Canadiens and Calgary Flames at five each. The Edmonton Oilers, Vancouver Canucks and Winnipeg Jets will have four each, and the Ottawa Senators will get three appearances. As far as opponents, the Connor Bedard-led Chicago Blackhawks and the San Jose Sharks with Macklin Celebrini lead the way with three appearances each.

> I THINK AMAZON'S GOAL IS TO BE **THE BEST HOCKEY BROADCAST IN CANADA** – Jonah Sigel, yyzsportsmedia.com

"My expectation is they are going to be on par, if not exceeding, the TNT hockey production," Sigel said. "I think their goal is to be the best hockey broadcast in Canada. As a consumer, I haven't been as intrigued with a product since Fox did hockey with the glowing puck. We all know how that ended, but I don't think Amazon will go down that path."

MONEY MATCHUP MONDAY

Prime's streaming deal will see it host the Maple Leafs six times and young stars Bedard and Celebrini thrice each.

DAN HAMILTON-USA TODAY SPORTS

ANZE **KOPITAR**

DREW **DOUGHTY**

'ACE' BAILEY & MARK BAVIS HELMET STICKER

NHL

SWEATER SWITCH

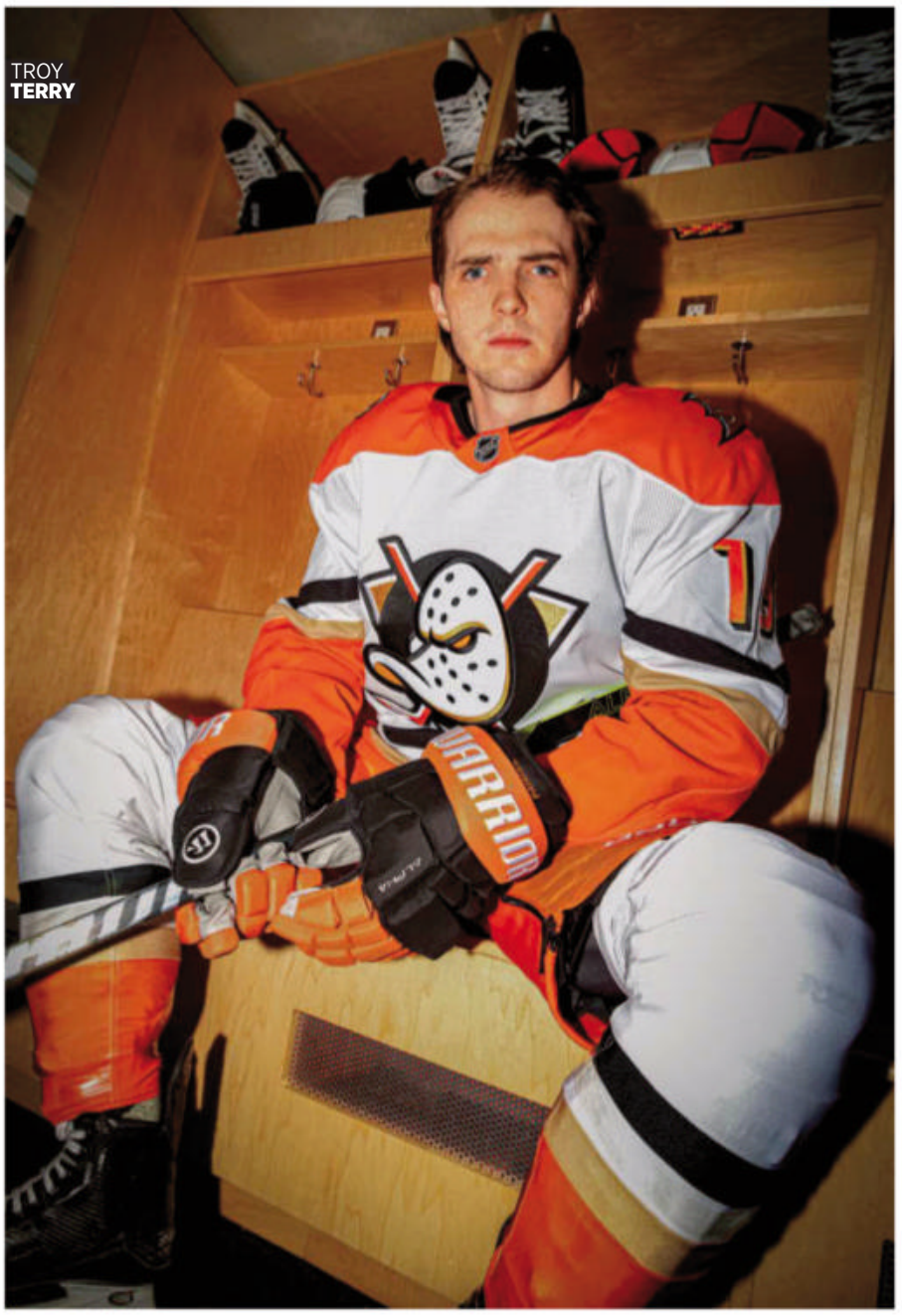
NHL teams will don new jerseys this year, with apparel company Fanatics taking over the league's new look **BY RYAN KENNEDY**

CHANGE CAN BE SCARY, especially in a sport like hockey, where traditions are venerated and hard to move on from. So, there was a lot of trepidation among fans and observers when the NHL struck a deal with apparel behemoth Fanatics to become the league's official outfitter beginning this season.

It didn't help when MLB had a mass wardrobe malfunction of its own before the 2024 season even began – but the blame there actually lay with Nike, which gave Fanatics its marching orders. What definitely *did* help was the fact that the NHL's jerseys will be manufactured in Canada – specifically, Saint-Hyacinthe, Que. – for Fanatics by the same company that has been doing it for almost half a century, SP Apparel.

The new uniforms roll out this season, but they already made the runway in June, when players donned them at the NHL draft in Las Vegas. We also got a couple of new designs in the summer, courtesy of the

KINGS JERSEY: PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE LOS ANGELES KINGS



Los Angeles Kings and Anaheim Ducks. The Kings will now be rocking a silver-and-black combo with a reworked version of their classic 'Chevrolet' logo, which rose to prominence during the Wayne Gretzky era in Los Angeles. Just down the road in Anaheim, the rival Ducks have gone with a bolder orange base and their own throwback crest – previously used on an alternate sweater – featured on both the home and away versions for the first time since 2006, when the team was still called the Mighty Ducks.

Structurally, the jerseys feature an extra layer of fabric in the lower sleeve to increase durability – something that was suggested by players and equipment managers alike.

On top of NHL team jerseys, Fanatics is also responsible for introducing a host of special sweaters this season, including the Winter Classic between Chicago and St. Louis, the Stadium Series featuring Columbus and Detroit at Ohio State's football stadium and the 4 Nations Face-Off between Canada, Finland, Sweden and the U.S.

DUCKS JERSEY: PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ANAHEIM DUCKS; FANATICS JERSEYS: PHOTOS BY FANATICS

IN MEMORIAM

JOHNNY & MATTHEW GAUDREAU

1993 - 2024

1994 - 2024

The tragic deaths of **JOHNNY** and **MATTHEW GAUDREAU** shook the hockey world to its core in late August. The siblings left behind loving families and young children. They're remembered for the many lives they touched, their passion for the game and their desire to give back to the sport they both so loved

BY KEN CAMPBELL

"The key question I've wrestled with lately is not necessarily, 'Where was God?' but, 'Can I trust a God who might not tell me why this happened?' And I have to be OK with that."

– Pastor Sean Brandow, who presided over a vigil following the Humboldt Broncos bus crash in 2018

OUTSIDE GATE D at Alumni Stadium on the campus of Boston College is a six-foot statue of Doug Flutie, even though the guy was no more than 5-foot-10 on his best day. Which is fitting, because at big-time American schools, the great ones are always larger than life. Right beside Alumni Stadium on the main campus, a stone's throw from the Chestnut Hill Reservoir, sits the Silvio O. Conte Forum, where the Boston College Eagles' hockey and basketball teams play their home games. That's where Jerry York wants the statue of Johnny Gaudreau. And with 28 years behind the Eagles' bench, where he won four national championships and nine Hockey East titles and sent dozens of players to the NHL, you'd think the Hall of Famer might have some pull there.

If York manages to convince the school's administration to erect a permanent monument, a re-creation of Johnny Hockey's backhander over the shoulder of Ferris State goalie Taylor Nelson to seal the 2012 Frozen Four title is a natural choice, just as the depiction of Flutie cocked back and about to release his Hail Mary pass against Miami in 1984 was the only way to go. And for time immemorial, two undersized guys who proved all their critics wrong and rose to become the best players in the nation en route to remarkable pro careers would be immortalized.

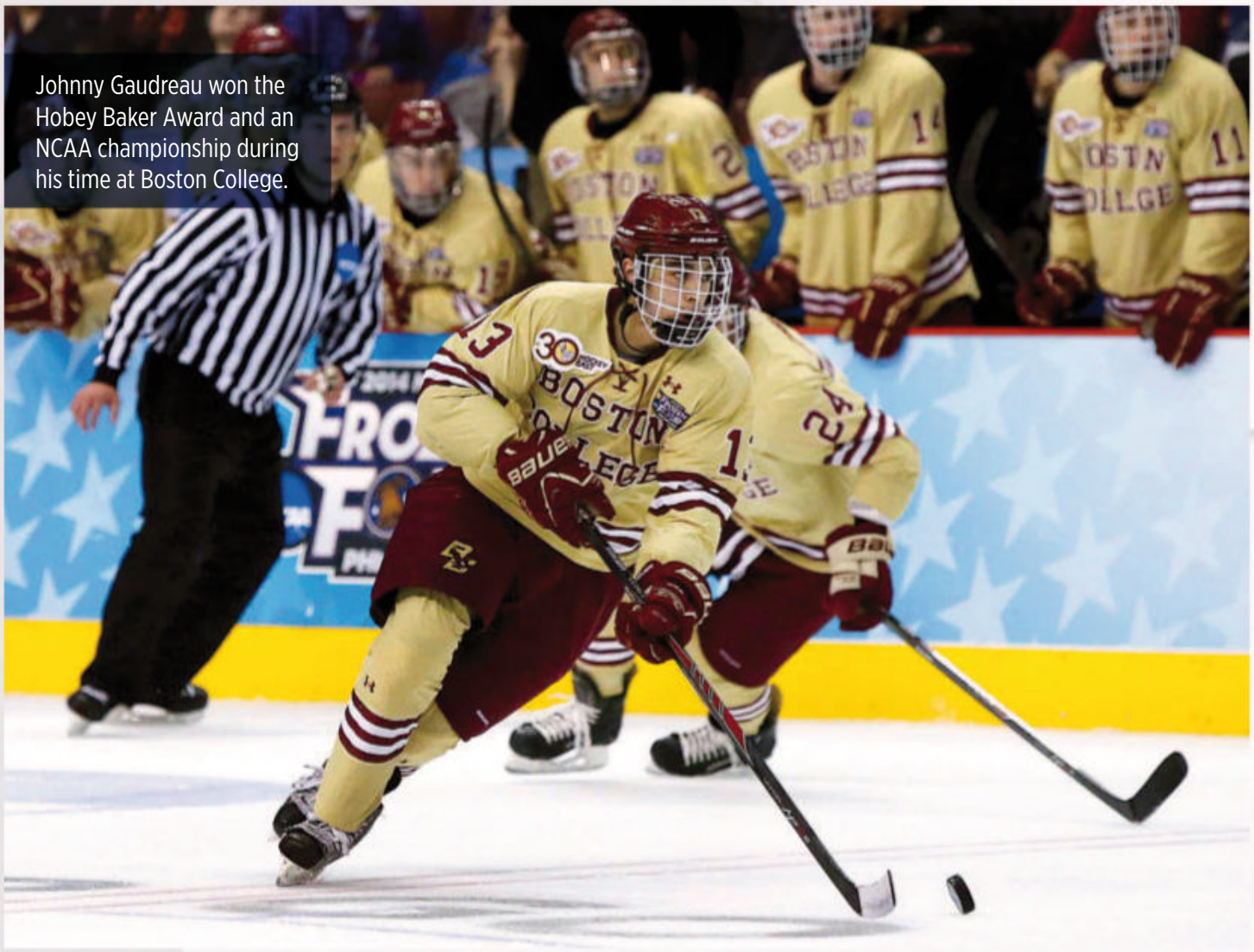
"That's something I'd really push for," said York on the morning of Aug. 30, barely 12 hours after Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, who both played for York at BC, were killed by an alleged drunk driver on a country road in Oldmans Township, N.J., when they were struck on their bicycles returning from their little sister's wedding rehearsal party.

The day after the accident, Katie Gaudreau was to marry Devin Joyce in an event that would have brought the Gaudreau family all together, which was always their happy place. When we plan our families, we all want what Guy and Jane Gaudreau had, don't we? We envision our kids being successful people and decent human beings who want nothing more than to be close to home and to enjoy spending time with one another.

All of that is gone. Not forgotten, but gone. Multiple families have been shattered. Two-year-old Noa and toddler Johnny Jr. will have to rely on their mother, Meredith, to tell them how their father's sublime hockey talent was surpassed only by his character. Tripp Gaudreau, who will come into the world later this year, will have to be told by his mother, Madeline, how his dad never allowed skating in his big brother's shadow to bother him and how, after playing pro hockey, he came home to pass on what he'd learned from his father to other young players. "It's just devastating," said former Columbus Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen, who signed Johnny as a UFA in the summer of 2022. "I don't think you can write a sadder story than this one."

As the best league in the world prepared for the start of training camp, it did so reeling from an unfathomable tragedy that was impossible to understand. Brian Burke, who signed Gaudreau to his first NHL contract with the Calgary Flames in 2014, lost his son Brendan in a car accident in 2010, and not even he was able to fathom the grief the Gaudreau family would be enduring. "It's the perfect storm of misery," Burke said.

Players who were close to both Johnny and Matthew expressed their shock and devastation, and many donated to a GoFundMe for Mat-



Johnny Gaudreau won the Hobey Baker Award and an NCAA championship during his time at Boston College.

thew's unborn child. Cole Caufield of the Montreal Canadiens, who played with Johnny on Team USA at the 2024 World Championship, announced he would be changing his number from 22 to 13 to honor his childhood hero. There will be many, many other tributes to both Johnny and Matthew.

A lot of this is to be expected when two people with so much of their lives ahead of them lose everything in one second of selfish and terrible decision-making. Johnny was a great hockey player, and Matthew was a very good one, but the grief everyone is feeling goes much deeper than that loss. You cannot fake what the Gaudreau boys had, and that was authenticity. They were truly loved by those with whom they came in contact. "The better the person, the greater the loss is," Burke said. "When something like this happens, they always say, 'He was a great kid.' Well, they're not all great kids. Some of them are average kids. Some of them are bad kids. When you have someone like Johnny and Matthew, who were great kids, it's really a puzzling loss. Impossible to comprehend."

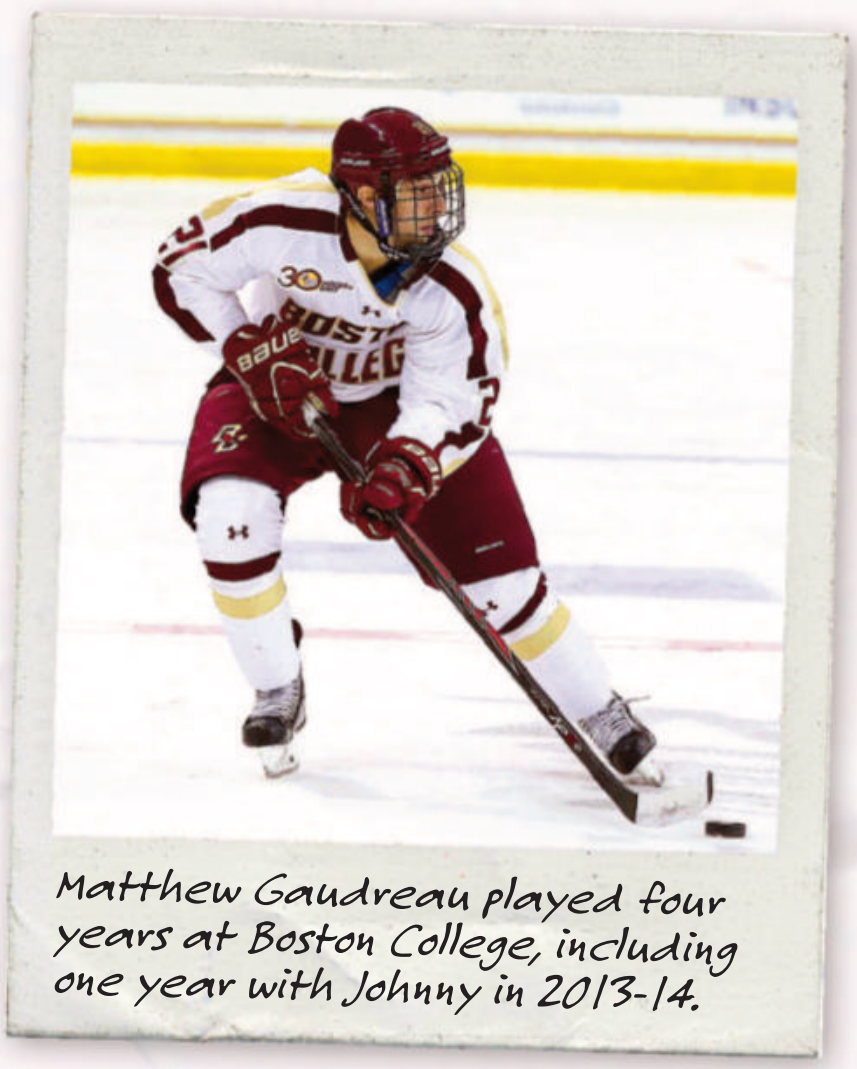
York remembers both Johnny and Matthew as people who could light up a room. He refers to Guy and Jane as, "Hall of Fame parents." Johnny was definitely the more skilled player, while Matthew would go to the dirty areas of the ice and absorb punishment to get the puck.

York remembers first seeing Johnny play hockey at a summer festival, and he turned to his assistant coach and asked him why they hadn't recruited this kid. He was told that Johnny had committed to Northeastern at 16, after assistant coach Albie O'Connell saw him playing high-school and under-16 hockey in South Jersey. Matthew followed the next year and committed to Northeastern at 15. But when current Anaheim Ducks coach Greg Cronin left Northeastern to take a job with the Toronto Maple Leafs, Johnny and Matthew asked to be released from their commitment and joined the Eagles.

Johnny left the decision up to Matthew, who turned to Johnny after their Boston College visit and said, "Hey, let's go here." ("God bless Matty for that," York said.) At the first team meeting in 2011, Kevin Hayes asked York if Johnny was really the same kid he'd been raving about. After the first practice, Hayes informed York that he had the right guy, and the two of them went on to make a mockery of their opponents on the ice and form an indelible bond off it.

Whenever the Eagles won a Hockey East or Beanpot Championship and posed for a team photo, you'd have to search to find Johnny in it. "It was like 'Where's Waldo?' " York said.

After games, Johnny would try to blend in with the rest of the students, always uncomfortable with being the center of attention, even though he'd do things on the ice that would make him that. But the thing that separated Johnny from other players was the passion with which he played the game. Never seemed to have a bad day. Felt like the luckiest guy in the world most days, even the less-than-stellar ones the past couple of years in Columbus. "There were days Johnny would come off the ice and say, 'Thanks, coach. That was a great practice today,' " York said. "You expect that from a fourth-liner or a backup goalie, but this is your best player. You want to get 100 percent out of a kid, and all of a sudden, you



Matthew Gaudreau played four years at Boston College, including one year with Johnny in 2013-14.

JOHN QUACKENBOS/BOSTON COLLEGE ATHLETICS

It's just devastating. I don't think you can write a sadder story than this one

– Former Columbus Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen

get a kid like Johnny who steps on the ice, and Matt later on, and he just lifted the whole practice up."

Burke first saw Johnny in his draft year when he was playing for the USHL's Dubuque Fighting Saints. Then the GM of the Leafs, Burke went to a weekend series to watch Zemgus Girgensons, and the more he watched Girgensons, the more he liked Gaudreau. By the time Gaudreau turned pro, both were with the Flames, and Burke, who was Calgary's president of hockey operations and acting GM, signed Gaudreau just hours after he had won the Hobey Baker Award and the a day after Eagles were eliminated in the Frozen Four semifinal.

The Flames flew Gaudreau to Calgary on a private jet in time for him to appear in the team's final game of 2013-14, and he scored a goal on his first shot. "The happiest you would see him was when he was playing hockey," Burke said. "Always smiling, always in a good mood. He would say, 'I can't believe I'm playing hockey for a living.' Very popular, very unselfish and a hard, hard worker."

When it came to that, he and Matthew had a great template. Their father, Guy, is in the Norwich University Hall of Fame for both hockey and soccer and has a burning passion for the game. Guy, a former dairy farmer from Vermont, went to work at the Hollydell Ice Arena in Sewell, N.J., near the Delaware River that separates the Jersey Shore from Philadelphia. Because he ran the rink, Guy oversaw programs and coached teams and had the ice to himself and his two sons when nobody was using it. He taught them both to skate by placing Skittles on the ice and having Johnny and Matt chase them. They both became terrific players, but how could they ever make it as hockey players, these wispy, little guys from suburban Philly who couldn't put on weight and were the smallest guys on the ice?

What nobody accounted for was their passion, which came through in everything they did. The same passion they displayed on the ice, they also had for their families.

Surrounded by family, Johnny celebrates his Hobey Baker Award in 2014. Days later, he was in the NHL.

TOP: SERGEI BELSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS; BOTTOM: JOHN QUACKENBOS/BOSTON COLLEGE ATHLETICS

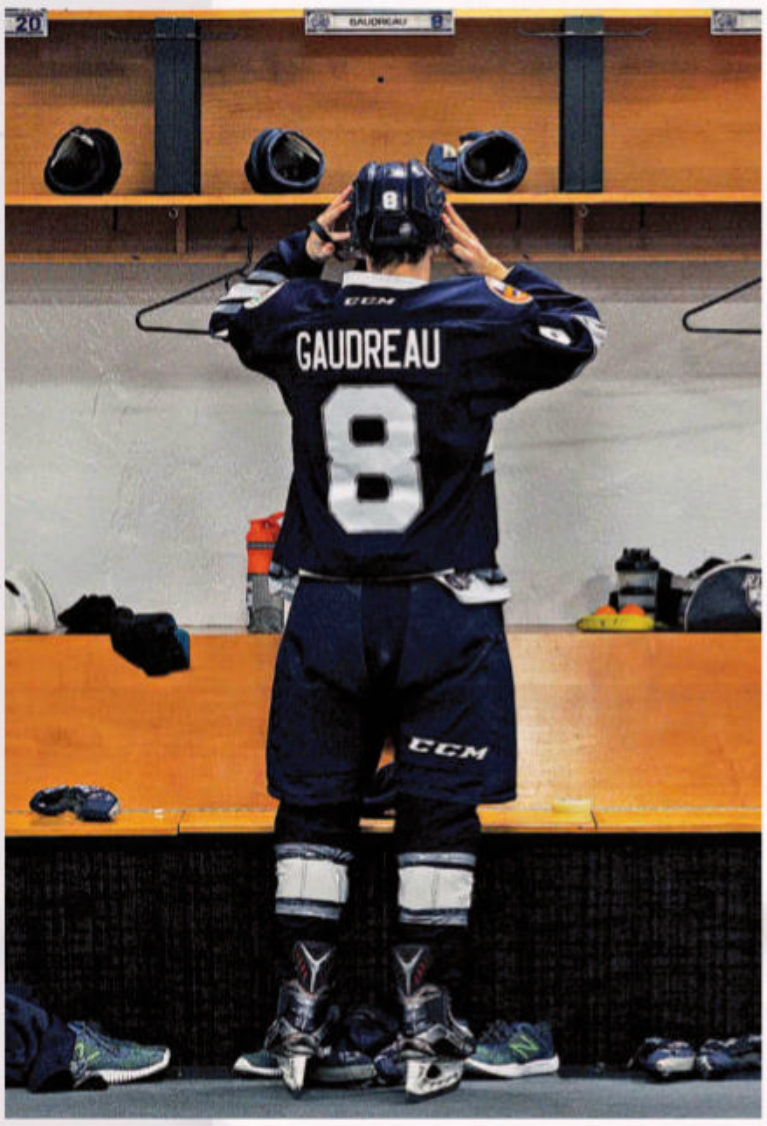
GOING PRO

After university, Matthew spent a few seasons in the AHL and ECHL before returning home to coach.

The better the person, the greater the loss. When you have someone like Johnny and Matthew, who were great kids, it's really a puzzling loss. Impossible to comprehend

– Former Calgary Flames president of hockey operations Brian Burke

There were a lot of pictures and videos circulating after the accident – Johnny on Brady Tkachuk's shoulders at Hayes' wedding; Johnny and Matthew being goofballs and dancing to *Finesse* by Bruno Mars; Johnny beaming with his two kids in front of a birthday cake with No. 31, taken just two weeks before his death. In all of them, there's an unbridled passion for life that simply cannot be faked. "Seeing John as a father, it was clear his family meant everything to him," said Blue Jackets captain Boone Jenner. "I'll miss seeing his joy coming up to our family room after every home game to greet (Meredith) and the kids. Despite being one of the last to join us after a well-earned sauna and a beer, the smile on his and Noa's faces when they saw each other was unmatched, followed by a, 'Hey, Reg,' to Mere."



Matthew shared that passion for his family, and it was what brought him back home a couple of years ago to coach hockey and pass on what Guy had taught him and so many other kids. "He would say, 'Everybody 1989 birth year and older all learned to skate from my dad,' " said Justin Hale, the coach and GM of the Philadelphia Rebels of the North American League, where Matthew was an assistant coach. "And that was a badge of honor for him, to be around family and be there for his child, but he still wanted to give back to the game. That was his dream."

Matthew left Hollydell and the Rebels after last season for the opportunity to become a hockey director at the PNY Sports Arena in Pennsylvania, where he would've been running youth programs and serving as an assistant with the West Chester Wolves in the U.S. Premier League. He was also the coach at Gloucester Catholic High School, where both he and Johnny played and Guy coached back in the day. "Every day, it was common to find a group of guys in his office hanging out and joking around," Hale said. "Because of his playing background and passion, he could've made it a long way if he wanted to do the junior/college route, but it was more about giving back to those younger players. It was more about teaching the love of the game to those guys."

This would've been Johnny's 11th full season in the NHL. In all that time, he missed a total of only 20 games. He scored some huge playoff goals for the Flames. He made the all-rookie team in 2014-15, won the Lady Byng Trophy in 2016-17 and was a first-team all-star in 2021-22. Though he didn't win a Stanley Cup, he won almost everything else, including a USHL Clark Cup, an NCAA title and a WJC gold medal. He was the most outstanding player in college hockey. Picked 104th overall, he's second only to Nikita Kucherov in points among players drafted in 2011. His final assist last season was the 500th of his career. He was a point-per-gamer at a time when it's really hard to score goals. Yes, he benefitted from a league that was far more welcoming to smaller, skilled players, and he used those conditions to thrive. He might've one day found himself in the Hall of Fame. Now, it seems as though it should be a given.

It was all right there in his name, 'Johnny Hockey,' a moniker he never asked for nor perpetuated, despite attempts from his handlers to capitalize on it. In its criteria for selection, the Hockey Hall of Fame lists, "Playing ability, sportsmanship, character and contributions to his or her team or teams and to the game of hockey in general." Johnny Gaudreau checks all of those boxes. Playing ability? Seriously? Let's not waste time on that one. Sportsmanship? How about four penalty minutes and the Lady Byng Trophy in 2016-17. Contributions? He was a proven winner, a guy who made players around him better and, in the words of Blue Jackets alternate captain Sean Kuraly, was "good to the core."

"John leaves us a life's example of simplicity and joy," Kuraly said.

TOP: PHOTO BY BRIDGEPORT ISLANDERS; BOTTOM: RICH LEBLANC/WORCESTER RAILERS

"He expressed that to the masses through hockey and personally through his relationships, which explains why he was universally adored by the communities and lives that were lucky enough to enjoy No. 13."

There will be time for that later, once the grieving subsides. There will be number retirements, tributes and reflections. But for those who knew both Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau, this is still so, so difficult. You could see it in the anguished faces of Columbus teammates Jenner, Kuraly, Erik Gudbranson and Zach Werenski as they spoke about Gaudreau in the days after the accident.

As the family, friends and hockey world process their grief, they will learn in time to cherish the memories, as we all do when we lose someone. But as Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell said, Gaudreau's death leaves a massive chasm in Columbus' room and an even larger one in everyone's hearts, whether they knew Johnny and Matthew or admired them from afar. "There are so many days in life that are golden days," York said. "You love it, and everything is perfect. But then there are some nightmares you wake up to and just wish they weren't there. And this is one of those nightmarish days." H

AMERICAN STAR

Johnny's final game was with Team USA at the 2024 World Championship in Czechia.

Fans in Calgary and Columbus paid tribute to Johnny and Matthew in the days after the tragedy.

LEFT: PHOTO BY USA HOCKEY; RIGHT: SERGEI BELSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS; SADDLEDOME: PHOTO COURTESY OF EDWARD WALSH; NATIONWIDE ARENA: COLUMBUS DISPATCH/USA TODAY NETWORK

A PICTURE WORTH 100 Cups

ACTUALLY, THE 14 MEN IN THIS PHOTO COMBINED TO WIN 101 STANLEY CUPS DURING THEIR YEARS IN THE NHL, THE VAST MAJORITY WITH MONTREAL'S FOUR-TIME DYNASTY IN THE LATE 1970s

BY KEN CAMPBELL

BY THE TIME YOU read this, William 'Scotty' Bowman will have almost completed his 91st trip around the sun. He used to collect hockey cards, you know. Can you imagine the treasure trove of artifacts this guy has, what with all the winning and everything? After he drove himself back home to Buffalo from Serge Savard's annual golf tournament in suburban Montreal in early August – because Scotty Bowman – he had a replica Stanley Cup to declare at the border. Yeah, like he really needs another one of those.

But when Savard gets around to it, he's going to send his old coach a piece of memorabilia that will rank right up there with Bowman's 1974-75 O-Pee-Chee rookie card or the photo of him skating around with the Stanley Cup after winning it the final time as a coach in 2002 with the Detroit Red Wings.

"This one," Bowman said, "I'm really going to treasure."

"This one" is a photo that is so dense in hockey greatness that it could only have been taken at a place called Le Mirage, which is the golf course where Savard held his annual charity golf tournament this summer. It's an event that has raised millions of dollars for university scholarships over the years, in part because of the star power carried by those Savard can invite. And this year, Savard had the idea of inviting Bowman and the other 12 surviving players who suited up for what is generally regarded as the greatest team ever to play the game. From 1976 through '79, the Canadiens set the standard for greatness, vanquishing the Broad Street Bullies and replacing their style of smashmouth hockey with the kind of skill and elan that was overwhelming.

So, when the 14 men assembled for a photograph outside the clubhouse, it was one of those moments that, in time, should take its place with Bobby Orr's flying goal celebration in 1970, Paul Henderson's elation two years later and a bruised and battered 'Rocket' Richard and 'Sugar' Jim Henry shaking hands after their 1952 playoff series. There they are in one of the most voluminous gatherings of greatness you'll ever see, all 14 of them and their combined 101 Stanley Cups.

Yes, you read that right. *One hundred and one Stanley Cups.* That's how many Bowman (14), Jacques Lemaire (11), Yvan Cournoyer and Larry Robinson (10 each), Savard (nine), Ken Dryden, Guy Lapointe, Doug Jarvis and Bob Gainey (six each), Steve Shutt, Mario Tremblay and Doug Risebrough (five each) and Yvon Lambert and Rick Chartraw (four each) won as players, GMs, assistant GMs, coaches, assistant coaches and executives. Fifty-six of those Cups were accounted for in those four dynastic seasons, when Montreal lost a total of 46 games – seven fewer than the Chicago Blackhawks and eight fewer than the San Jose Sharks lost in 2023-24 alone.

The only two missing from the photo were Guy Lafleur and Michel 'Bunny' Larocque. Sadly, Larocque died of brain cancer in 1992 at the age of 40, Lafleur of lung cancer 30 years later at the age of 70. But as Flyers coach Fred Shero said: when you win, you walk together forever. Forty-five years later, the Canadiens are still walking together. Some are getting around better than others, but the bonds they forged during those four years will never be broken.

Chartraw came all the way from Australia. Lapointe, who has mouth cancer and wasn't able to eat solid foods, was also there. It's only fitting that in the photo, he's flanked on one side by Robinson and Savard and on the other by Dryden, the four men who represented the fortress that was the Canadiens' defensive zone. Bowman lamented the fact that Lapointe – who was one of the most notorious practical jokers in hockey history and whose ability to keep the room loose was exceeded only by his sublime gifts as a player – was pretty quiet. Savard said when the group gathered for an intimate dinner the first night they were together, it was as poignant as it was festive. "It was really, really emotional," Savard said. "Some of the guys were crying."

The highlight of the event was the first night. It marked the first time they had all been together since they won their final Cup, and, with the exception of Dryden – who wrote a book with Bowman recently – the first time the players had a chance to speak to their former coach as an equal. Even though the dynamic was different, Dryden said there was no doubt that Bowman still commanded both the room and his former players' respect. "In the center of it was Scotty," Dryden said. "He knew things we didn't know at the time. He knew things that were going on before we came into the NHL. Everyone, even if they weren't conscious of it, was looking to hear his take on us as a team and us as individuals. It was as if we were still waiting for the coach to offer judgment on us 45 years later."

VALÉRIE BLUM/INVITATION SERGE SAVARD 2024

SUMMERTIME WINNERS AND LOSERS

From the draft to free agency to the trade market, it was a busy off-season in the NHL as teams tried to load up for a Stanley Cup run – or at least rebuild for the future. Here are four clubs who fared well and four others who came up short

BY RYAN KENNEDY

WHAT HAD already been an intriguing summer became even more so in mid-August when the St. Louis Blues extended offer sheets to not one but *two* young Edmonton Oilers at the same time. It was a brazen gambit that did indeed land the Blues defenseman Philip Broberg and left winger Dylan Holloway when Edmonton eventually declined to match.

That week of suspense – during what is usually a slow time for hockey news – captivated fans and media alike, ending with St. Louis GM Doug Armstrong giving a quote for the ages when he claimed he would offer-sheet a team even if his own mother was the GM.

But let's not forget everything that came before. After all, July 1 and the beginning of free agency was pretty seismic itself, with big names such as Steven Stamkos, Jake Guentzel and Chris Tanev finding new homes. The landscape has shifted in the NHL, and therefore, it's time to determine the winners and losers.

In the following pages, we look at eight teams who fell on either side of the ledger for us, and it's important to establish that we weren't just looking for the franchises who put themselves in line for a Stanley Cup run. No, it's important to recognize that some teams are in a different phase of their building cycle, and it would be silly to punish those in a rebuild for not going all-in on a pricey free agent at this juncture.

The Calgary Flames, for example, should be expected to endure a few more seasons of pain as second-year GM Craig Conroy leads the team through a rebuild. And to his credit, his scouting staff had an excellent 2024 draft. Similarly, the San Jose Sharks will still be guppies this season – but their job is to fold impact prospects Macklin Celebrini and Will Smith into the pro game.

On the other end of the spectrum, the defending-champion Florida Panthers were always going to lose talent to free agency after going all-in, but we're pretty confident they're OK with that, as they took turns eating cereal and playing golf with the Cup this summer. Heck, even with Edmonton losing Broberg and Holloway, the 2024 runners-up will still be contenders again.

So, with all that out of the way, let's take a look at some of the teams who helped – or hindered – their causes over the summer.

WINNERS

NEW JERSEY DEVILS

INJURIES AND GOALTENDING DOOMED the Devils last season, and while you can't prevent players from getting hurt, you can protect yourself somewhat with depth. To that end, GM Tom Fitzgerald fortified his defense corps by snagging a couple of proven pros in Brett Pesce and Brenden Dillon, two guys whose values will only increase in the playoffs. With Dougie Hamilton healthy and continued growth from top-flight youngsters Luke Hughes and Simon Nemec, New Jersey now has a very promising blueline.

As for goaltending, Fitzgerald went big-game hunting and came back with the prize in 34-year-old Jacob Markstrom, acquired from Calgary in a June trade that sent mammoth defenseman Kevin Bahl and a 2025 first-round pick to the Flames.

When Markstrom is at the top of his game, he's one of the best: in 2021-22, he finished second to Igor Shesterkin in Vezina Trophy voting. He was fourth in Vezina voting two years before that. If he can play around that level, the Devils will be a hard out. At the least, he just has to be decent to elevate the team's crease play from last season.

Up front, Paul Cotter was swapped in for Alex Holtz, with Cotter giving the Devils more jam in the bottom six. Scoring shouldn't be an issue for the Jack Hughes-led offense, so being harder to play against made the Holtz trade understandable.

NASHVILLE PREDATORS

TO DATE, THE MOST SUCCESSFUL Predators squad of all-time was the 2016-17 edition. That team went all the way to the Stanley Cup final before falling to Pittsburgh. Those Predators had a loaded blueline led by the likes of Roman Josi, Mattias Ekholm, P.K. Subban and Ryan Ellis. But the highest scorers were Viktor Arvidsson and Ryan Johansen, who tied for the regular-season team lead with 61 points apiece. Even in the playoffs, Nashville didn't have a point-per-game scorer.

Fast-forward to today and GM Barry Trotz has assembled a team that still boasts a perennial Norris Trophy contender in Josi as well as a star netminder in Juuse Saros but now also has some real scoring punch thanks to the moon-shot signing of future Hall of Famer Steven Stamkos. The erstwhile Tampa Bay captain begins his Nashville journey with another high-impact forward in original Vegas 'Misfit' Jonathan Marchessault, which is great news for stalwart Preds sniper Filip Forsberg, who never seemed to have enough offensive support in the past.

On the back end, Trotz landed another coveted UFA when he inked former Carolina mainstay Brady Skjei to a long-term deal, and with proven playoff performer Luke Schenn already in the fold, Nashville's defense corps is looking impressive again.

SMASHVILLE SCORES

Not only did the Predators reel in Stamkos via free agency, they landed Marchessault as well.

MARKSTROM: SERGEI BELSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS; STAMKOS: BOB FRID-USA TODAY SPORTS

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

ROME WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY, AND the Blackhawks will most likely finish near the bottom of the standings once again, but GM Kyle Davidson made some deft moves this summer. Most importantly, he gave franchise cornerstone Connor Bedard a couple of top-line wingers to try out in UFA signings Tyler Bertuzzi and Teuvo Teravainen. In Bertuzzi, Chicago gets a net-front master who goes to the greasy areas, while Teravainen brings a Cup ring from his first stint in Chicago, plus plenty of playmaking and skill. Last year's acquisition of Taylor Hall was also done for Bedard's benefit, but an early knee injury put the kibosh on that. Luckily, Hall is still around, so Chicago actually has some scoring depth. Add in bruising winger Pat Maroon and no one is going to push the younger Hawks around.

On 'D,' the Blackhawks got deeper – to be fair, they couldn't have gotten any thinner – with three-time Cup winner Alec Martinez and smooth T.J. Brodie. In goal, Petr Mrazek has a new partner in Laurent Brossoit, who has posted back-to-back years with a .927 save percentage as the backup first in Vegas then in Winnipeg – winning a Cup with the former. There is still work to do, but at least the Hawks don't look tragic again.

BEDARD'S NEW BUDS

Chicago added goals and grit to its forward group in the form of veterans Bertuzzi, above, Teravainen and Maroon.

BERTUZZI: DAN HAMILTON-USA TODAY SPORTS; CHYCHRUN: MARC DESROSIERS-USA TODAY SPORTS

WASHINGTON CAPITALS

GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE: for a while there, it seemed like the Capitals were happy to be a middle-of-the-road squad with the primary aim of helping captain Alex Ovechkin break Wayne Gretzky's all-time NHL goal record. And hey, with Ovechkin just 42 goals away, that is very much still on the table for this season. But last year's surprise playoff entry actually got considerably better on paper during the summer, with new GM Chris Patrick taking the helm for the promoted Brian MacLellan in the process.

The Caps did much of their damage via trade, with defenseman Jakob Chychrun being the best acquired asset. Chychrun's tenure in Ottawa didn't work out as planned, but in Washington, he'll have offensive defenseman and team pillar John Carlson to play off of, while free-agent signing Matt Roy brings a wealth of experience to town.

Up front, Washington added a couple players in need of a change of scenery. Andrew Mangiapane, a 35-goal scorer not too long ago in Calgary, looks to regain that form after a trade, while Pierre-Luc Dubois is on his last chance to make a good first impression. Adding goalie Logan Thompson from Vegas takes some heat off last year's team MVP, Charlie Lindgren.

LOSERS

DETROIT RED WINGS

THE UNFORTUNATE REALITY OF rebuilding is that sometimes it doesn't work out. We're not at that point yet with Detroit – but it's getting pretty close. Part of the problem is the division: Florida, Boston and Toronto are consistent playoff locks, and Tampa Bay is still pretty darn good. Buffalo and Ottawa are basically in the same spot as Detroit, but seem better prepared for the present. GM Steve Yzerman re-signed Patrick Kane and added two-time Cup winner Vladimir Tarasenko, so what was a top-10 offense should still be pretty good, especially if Lucas Raymond continues his ascent.

What the 'Yzerplan' has not mapped out is an intimidating defense. We love Moritz Seider and have high hopes for Simon Edvinsson, but we don't expect the kid to replace Shayne Gostisbehere's 56 blueline points immediately. The rest of the 'D' is big but old.

Goaltending is also a huge question mark. Alex Lyon returns, but he shouldn't see 43 starts again if the team is going to have success. Cam Talbot comes in to take the starter's job, but is he L.A. Talbot or Ottawa Talbot? Take a guess which team had a better defense in front of him at the time and which is closer to what Detroit has right now.

LOS ANGELES KINGS

AFTER L.A. WAS ONCE AGAIN whomped in the first round of the playoffs by Edmonton, it feels like the Kings have established their ceiling. Now, the existential question becomes the following: are they better or worse on paper this season? Continued growth from Quinton Byfield will help up front, but the offense slipped last year, and the additions of Warren Foegele and Tanner Jeannot just make Los Angeles heavier, not more skilled. That's helpful in the playoffs – assuming you get there.

The defense corps looks pretty good, and if Brandt Clarke can come in and make an impact with his offensive skill, some of the pressure will come off workhorse Drew Doughty. The biggest fear is in net. GM Rob Blake solved his Pierre-Luc Dubois problem by dealing the center to Washington in exchange for goalie Darcy Kuemper, but this was the same Kuemper who lost the Caps' starting job to Charlie Lindgren. Truthfully, Kuemper hasn't been the same since he helped Colorado win the Cup in 2022 (and the Avs won games in that post-season when he was hurt for a stretch).

To be sure, the Kings are still a decent outfit, but they have some Death Star vulnerabilities – David Rittich is the backup goalie – so it's hard to see a high ceiling in Los Angeles this season.

NET QUESTION

Kuemper arrives in Los Angeles via trade, but can he recapture his Stanley Cup-winning form of 2022?

TALBOT: GARY A. VASQUEZ-USA TODAY SPORTS; KUEMPER: JAMES GUILLORY-USA TODAY SPORTS

COLORADO AVALANCHE

THIS MAY SEEM LIKE A HARSH assessment since the Avs could very well win the Cup, but they've also left themselves open to another early playoff exit in the fiendish Central Division. Uncertainty up front definitely hurts; we're all hoping captain Gabriel Landeskog can return to the ice and play most of the schedule and that Valeri Nichushkin gets the off-ice help he needs in order to come back in November after his suspension. But what if those two cannot be impact players? Nathan MacKinnon could very well win another Hart Trophy, and Mikko Rantanen could put up 100 points again, but beyond the top line, Colorado's forwards don't inspire much fear.

Elsewhere, the defense corps will once again be a strength thanks to Cale Makar and Devon Toews, while GM Chris MacFarland brought in intriguing wild cards in Oliver Kylington and Erik Brannstrom. But what about the goaltending? Starter Alexandar Georgiev ranked just 25th in the league last year in goals saved above expected, and there's a case to be made that Justus Annunen deserves more reps this season.

Again, there is no worry that Colorado will miss the playoffs, but this appears to be a very top-heavy unit, and they will need Herculean feats by MacKinnon, Makar and Rantanen in order to cut through the likes of Edmonton, Dallas and other contenders in the post-season.

BLUELINE BETS

The Avs brought in Kylington, above, and Brannstrom to bolster the defense, but there's reason for concern in Colorado.

KYLINGTON: SERGEI BELSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS; GOSTISBEHERE: TIM FULLER-USA TODAY SPORTS

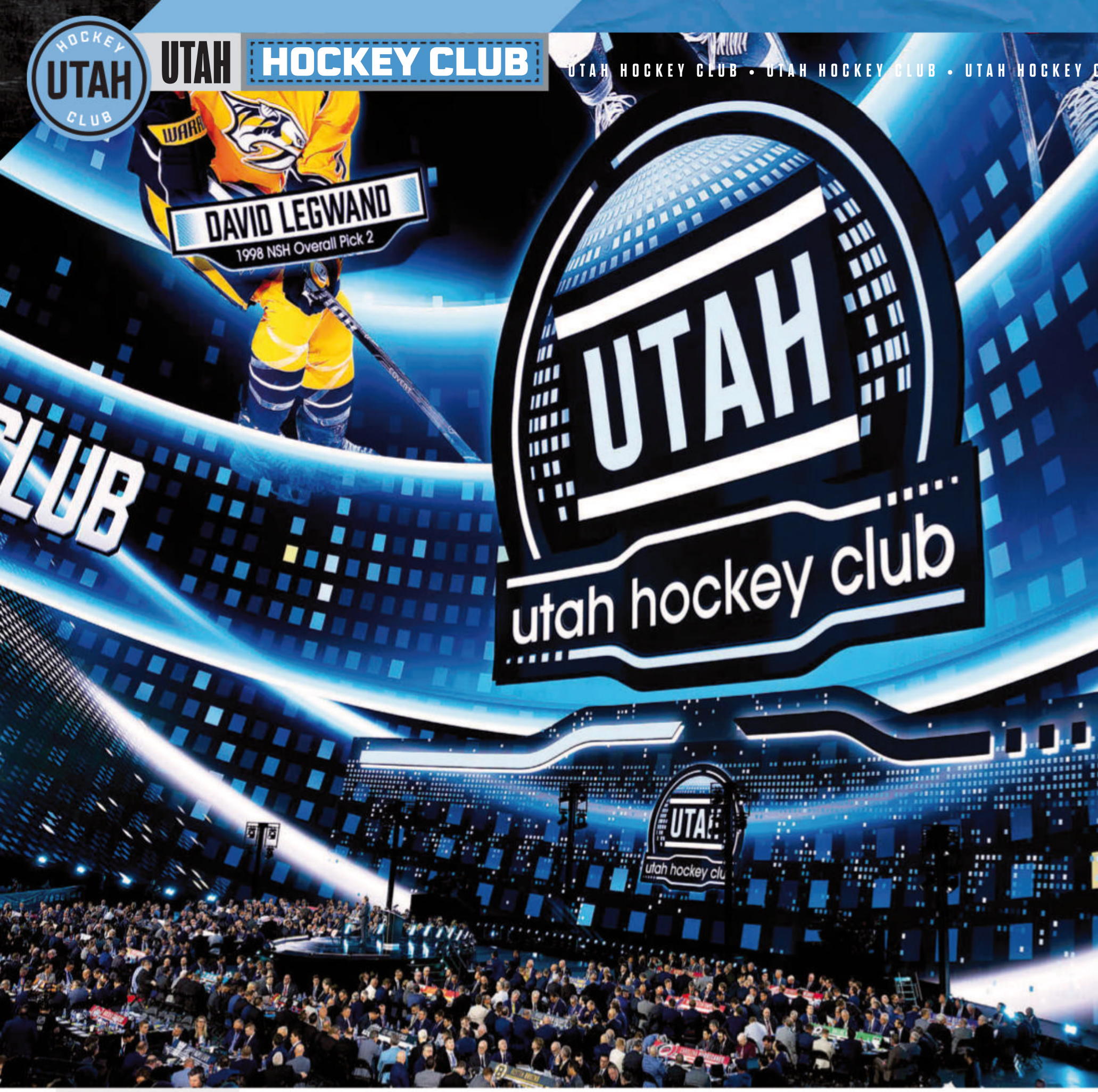
CAROLINA HURRICANES

IS THE CHAMPIONSHIP WINDOW still open? Is this the year the Hurricanes finally break through – right when we're not expecting them to? Or is this a regular-season team who just can't find the right style for the playoffs? While the Canes will likely still be one of the better teams in the East, the roster took some serious body blows in the off-season.

Defensemen Brady Skjei and Brett Pesce both left via free agency, and while new GM Eric Tulsky replaced them with puck-movers Sean Walker and Shayne Gostisbehere, Carolina's blueline got a lot smaller in the exchange, and recent Cup champs will tell you that's not a recipe for success.

Up front, Teuvo Teravainen left for Chicago, and marquee trade-deadline acquisition Jake Guentzel went to Tampa Bay, making him a 28-game rental for the Canes – and an expensive one at that. William Carrier arrives from Vegas as a heavy bottom-six forward, and Carolina also has some intriguing prospects who could crack the lineup, such as Bradly Nadeau.

In the crease, the Canes are runnin' it back with Frederik Andersen and Pyotr Kochetkov. Will it be the veteran or the kid in the post-season? Make the wrong choice and it's another year falling short of the mission.



UTAH JAM

PHOTO COURTESY OF UTAH HOCKEY CLUB

There's plenty of excitement ahead of Year 1 in **SALT LAKE CITY**, but the best part might be an up-and-coming team that finally appears on the verge of playoff relevance **BY RYAN KENNEDY**

THE 2024 NHL DRAFT in Las Vegas was a lot of things for a lot of different groups. For the San Jose Sharks, it was the opportunity to cement a No. 1 center of the future in first-overall pick Macklin Celebrini. For the NHL, it was the chance to stage a bold marquee event in one of the world's most buzzed-about new venues, The Sphere. (For the record, it was fantastic).

But there was another group who made a big splash in Las Vegas, and it was the Utah Hockey Club, inhabitants of the newest locale in the NHL and the team formerly known as the Arizona Coyotes.

For it was in The Sphere that the hockey media got their first in-person scrum with new owner Ryan Smith. Not only that, but Utah had two first-round picks – Tij Iginla became the team's first official draftee at No. 6, while Cole Beaudoin went 24th overall – and GM Bill Armstrong shook up Day 2 of the draft when he made a pair of big-time trades, landing two-time Stanley Cup-champion D-man Mikhail Sergachev from Tampa Bay, then fortifying the back end further by nabbing John Marino from New Jersey.

It has all been a vortex of activity for Smith and his Utah crew, who rescued the Coyotes players and staff in April. Since then, there was a welcome party for the team in an airplane hangar in Salt Lake City, a crush of interest from locals for season tickets and, anecdotally, *way* more media waiting to interview Utah's picks at the draft than when the team was based in Arizona.

The franchise is still in the process of choosing a name with the help of a fan voting contest – it's going to be the Utah Yeti, right? – but for this upcoming season, they will take to the ice at the Delta Center with the state's name emblazoned across their chests in big, stair-stepped letters.

Had a chance to breathe yet after all of that? Must be nice. "It's been a whirlwind," Smith said. "We have phenomenal people in our organization, and everyone just lifted where they could to open up a market. It feels very much like a start-up in tech, where it's all hands on deck all the time. That's the world I come from, and it's been incredible. It's been inspiring, is what it's been. Not only from our people, but from the state and the community."

Pro hockey has been around in Salt Lake City for generations, with the ECHL's Utah Grizzlies currently inhabiting the southern suburbs. But the state hadn't really been on NHL radars until recently, with the sport filling out through the west and a specific need – a reliable owner who had a building to play in immediately – being found in Smith. Undoubtedly, the NHL tried its best to make it work in Arizona, but the uncertainty surrounding where the Coyotes would be playing in the future and whether owner Alex

Meruelo could find said home simply became too much for the league to bear.

Smith, who also owns the NBA's Utah Jazz, may not have envisioned his entry into hockey being so quick, but he's very excited about his new team and its new NHL market. "If you zoom out, it all makes sense," he said. "We were probably the only winter sports market that didn't have an NHL franchise, as well as the home of most U.S. Olympic training teams. It's all lining up in how we're viewing this moment in Utah. Watching what the NHL has done in Vegas and almost plowed the way for three other sports franchises…we're going to have that same impact."

Smith estimated that he and his team had five different construction projects going on, and with Salt Lake City recently being awarded the 2034 Winter Olympics, the building of a new arena in the near future seems obvious (the Delta Center will work fine for the short term, but it's a basketball-centric building, which means some seats won't be optimal, or even usable, for hockey games). The team will practise at the Olympic Oval – from which the city hosted the Olympics back in 2002 – in its first season, but a new practice facility is already in the works on the site of an old shopping mall.

As for interest in the team, it came immediately. "We're going to be sold out this year," Smith said. "We'll be in the top 15 in tickets in Year 1 – with 7,000 seats that aren't quite set up for hockey yet. People will be watching on the Jumbotron, and they'll be happy. And we haven't even gotten through the 30,000 list of people who have registered. Sixty-three percent of them haven't been to an event at our arena in a year. And 90 percent aren't Jazz season-ticket holders."

While there will be a honeymoon period for the team in Year 1, Utah does have the advantage of coming in as a club on the rise rather than an expansion unit. Armstrong had been held back by financial concerns in Arizona, yet still built a competitive team. This summer, he actually got to throw around some dollars, beginning with the acquisitions of Sergachev and Marino – who combine for nearly $13 million in cap space per season. "I've known both those kids since back in their junior days," Armstrong said. "They have very strong character. Sea-

GETTING IGGY WITH IT

Tij Iginla became Utah's first-ever draft pick when the team snagged the scoring center at sixth overall.

RYAN SMITH

DRAFT: STEPHEN R. SYLVANIE-USA TODAY SPORTS; SMITH: PHOTO COURTESY OF UTAH HOCKEY CLUB

sons can go up and down, but they're still young men that have some learning to do. But they can have a great impact on our organization. Both can move the puck and play huge minutes. They're going to be good pieces for us."

The blueline was further strengthened via free agency with another Cup winner in 35-year-old Ian Cole, who was happy to sign in a new market. "The idea of being on a team that's in a city for the first time and getting to experience that will be very fun," Cole said. "Especially one that, very clearly in Utah, has embraced this team with open arms. It's hard not to be excited for a situation like that."

The fact Salt Lake City rolled out the red carpet as soon as the move from Arizona was announced certainly helped matters. "Obviously, it was a tough situation in Arizona," Marino said. "Then you go to Utah, where you know the management has been unbelievable with basketball and MLS (soccer). Watching the video of the guys coming out on stage and the fans and atmosphere, it seemed pretty cool. And it will be even more special to be a part of it."

MIKHAIL **SERGACHEV**

> **"IT'S BEEN A WHIRLWIND. IT'S BEEN INSPIRING, IS WHAT IT'S BEEN"**
>
> – Owner Ryan Smith on the team's arrival in Utah

Winning more games than they lose would be nice, too. Luckily, it looks like Armstrong has the team on the right track. The Sergachev and Marino trades were crucial because the GM knew he had a lot of holes to fill and free agency wouldn't cover all of them. But those two D-men also help the connective tissue of the team since they're around the same age as players such as perennial leading scorer Clayton Keller, power forward Lawson Crouse and goaltending gem Connor Ingram.

Armstrong had amassed a vast and impressive prospect pipeline in recent years, but those kids need to be folded into a roster; they can't be expected to carry the water right away. "We're starting to build now," Armstrong said. "A good team that competes for a Stanley Cup, almost 50 percent is traded for. We're going to amass these players and picks, but we'll also have to move some players for our needs. That's something we identified this year, and we still kept some good assets in the (Maveric) Lamoureuxs and (Dmitriy) Simashevs that will filter into our back side eventually."

In acquiring Sergachev, Armstrong had to send one of the franchise's best prospects – center Conor Geekie – to the Lightning, while losing draft picks in both that trade and the Marino deal with New Jersey. But Utah still made 11 selections in 2024 after Armstrong had 12 picks in 2023 and 10 the year before that.

Hoarding picks was the right way to start the rebuild, and now, the team has started to reap the benefits. "Those are the drafts you get really excited about because they can

WELCOME PARTY
Hundreds of new fans greeted the former Arizona Coyotes upon the team's touchdown in Utah.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UTAH HOCKEY CLUB

DMITRIY SIMASHEV, ARTEM DUDA **& DANIIL BUT**

have a huge impact," Armstrong said. "I like our scouting staff. We're adding players, and we're still swinging. People forget we took a lot of pain, a *lot* of pain, to be in the position we're in now. And now, we're coming out of it, and these are the good times where you get to see the young players roll in and the high picks. At the same time, you're adding good players through trades, and that was through a lot of pain."

Armstrong believes that Utah is in the fourth year of a rebuild, and any GM worth their salt will tell you it usually takes seven or eight seasons before you can truly become a contender. Having said that, the players have a positive outlook. "I looked at the roster and the potential I think it had," Cole said. "They lost 14 games in a row last year down in Arizona. Let's say they went .500 in those games; they're knocking on the door of a playoff spot. So it's a team that, when I played against them, I thought, 'Wow, this is actually a really good team,' and a team that could be very good in the future. I think we can take that step."

In a very competitive Central Division, that next step will be difficult, though attainable – The Hockey News' Yearbook predictions picked Utah as the second wild-card playoff team in the West – but at least for the players, there is stability off the ice for the first time in years. "The whole staff have done a tremendous job in making us comfortable," said center Barrett Hayton. "For me, the move was straightforward, but for guys with family, they made it easy. Even the trip we took there at the end of the season, they had all the resources here for us, and we got a great feel and excitement off of that."

MICHAEL CARCONE, NICK BJUGSTAD & **LAWSON CROUSE**

Smith is happy to bring that stability and excitement to a group he sees as deserving of it. "If you think about this group, they're incredibly resilient," he said. "I was watching them lead through a lot of uncertainty and build and stick to what they could to keep morale high with 'Coach Bear' (Andre Tourigny). They can have a little fun now and figure out what it is that we want to do together and have that optionality. There's nothing more I want to do than support these guys."

As for the rebuild itself, Smith has already been going through it with his NBA team, as the Jazz are probably a year behind their new hockey cousins. He has his GM in Armstrong and a new president of hockey operations in Chris Armstrong (not related), who came from the Wasserman sports agency. "Part of Chris' job is to manage me," Smith said. "And I've got (Jazz CEO) Danny Ainge on the other side managing me as well, so it's a pretty cool spot. But that's the balance. You're managing polar-opposite emotions at all times. You want to win now, but you want to win for the long term and create a culture. We're young, and the future looks bright. And with our other club, we're definitely playing the long game."

Smith says he always bets on youth and noted that Utah is the youngest state in the Union right now. He sees a population of Utahns who like to go out and believes his hockey team will be a hit with the locals, though he also knows he and his team are now responsible for building a brand with much less runway than is typical for a team in a new city. Now, all he can do is trust the people he has surrounded himself with and watch one of the biggest NHL stories of last spring turn into one of the most intriguing headlines of autumn. We hear Utah is nice that time of the year...H

ALREADY DIGGIN' IT

Members of the Hockey Club are loving what Utah has had to offer in their short time there so far.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UTAH HOCKEY CLUB

Arizona no longer has the NHL, but there's a movement to continue the game's growth in the southern state.

MARK J. REBILAS-USA TODAY SPORTS

COYOTES' LASTING IMPACT

As the NHL leaves, a new foundation arrives with the intent of keeping amateur hockey alive and well in ARIZONA

BY DEBRA RUGHOO

WHILE THE COYOTES NEVER enjoyed the success of other teams in the U.S. Sun Belt during their 28 years in Arizona, having an NHL franchise in the state did spark people's interest in playing the game and create a burgeoning hockey market.

Hockey participation in the desert rose dramatically since the original Winnipeg Jets relocated to Arizona in 1996. Street-hockey clinics run by the Coyotes' hockey-development department through schools' physical-education classes, and affordable on-ice learn-to-play programs hosted in cooperation with the Coyotes, NHL, USA Hockey and local rinks helped spur the increase.

In 1998-99, there were 3,382 registered amateur hockey players in Arizona. Since then, that number has nearly tripled to 9,524 in 2023-24. That's higher than other southern markets that got NHL clubs around the same time, such as North Carolina (8,174) and Tennessee (4,901), and more than some cold-weather states like North Dakota (7,262) and Alaska (8,743).

And kids from the Grand Canyon State haven't just been playing the sport – they're holding their own among the best of the best. Teams from Arizona have won U.S. national youth championships in each of the past three years, and several homegrown players have made it to the NHL. The most notable example is Auston Matthews, drafted first overall in 2016. Other Arizona natives who have been drafted include Matthew Knies, Cutter Gauthier, Jaden Lipinski and Josh Doan, son of retired Coyotes star Shane Doan.

Arizona players have also made Olympic hockey teams. Broc Little was the first player from the state to be part of the U.S. men's squad at the 2018 Olympics, and Knies made the roster in 2022. On the women's side, Lyndsey Fry was the first to play on a U.S. women's Olympic team, helping the Americans claim silver in 2014.

Fry, who was a Coyotes' hockey ambassador, has been involved with grassroots hockey in Arizona and wants to conserve its growth after the NHL franchise leaves. To do so, she teamed up with a few retired players to launch the Matt Shott Arizona Hockey Legacy Foundation. Shott, the Coyotes' senior director of hockey development, was passionate about growing the game. He died of cancer in 2021.

Fry and Shott were very close, so for Fry, starting the foundation was personal. She wants to keep Shott's hockey programs alive, "not only as a promise to him, but also as a promise to the hockey community that he worked tirelessly for," she said.

The group wants to ensure there is a seamless transition for the community programs that were operated by the Coyotes and for the projects the foundation plans to run. Getting learn-to-play programs launched is one of the top priorities. Fry says they're working on bringing over the team that was running everything on the Coyotes' side to the foundation. Since the programs are fairly turnkey and they're hiring people who know what to do, she said, "as soon as we get everything shifted, we're ready to go."

The foundation got a boost from the Meruelo family, former owners of the Coyotes and owners of AHL Tucson, who made a $2-million donation (composed of both monetary and other assets) to help support youth-hockey programs in Arizona.

Fry adds that the foundation has an online pledge campaign (azhockeylegacy.org/the-pledge) where you can take the pledge to do your part to keep Arizona hockey alive and growing. It doesn't have to be a financial gift; it could be anything.

"I hope people that are paying attention in the next couple of years see how resilient we are as a hockey community," Fry said. "We have some deeply passionate people who will do whatever it takes to make sure the sport is available, and hopefully get another NHL team back here."

STEVEN STAMKOS

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JOHN RUSSELL/NASHVILLE PREDATORS

WORKING IN CONCERT

Nashville splashed some serious cash this summer. But STEVEN STAMKOS, Jonathan Marchessault and Brady Skjei may well have gone somewhere else if their new Predators teammates hadn't had to skip out on a certain rock show last winter

BY KEN CAMPBELL

A LITTLE MORE THAN a month after he burned through more than $180 million of his employer's money in one day, Barry Trotz could be found slinging the nectar of the gods on the night shift in the beer shack at Canada's National Ukrainian Festival in his hometown of Dauphin, Man.

And, really, isn't that just the most Barry Trotz thing ever? Trotz's 86-year-old father had his voice box surgically removed over the summer as part of his treatment for throat cancer, and the festival was seeking volunteers. Trotz was getting kicked out of the hospital every night at 8 p.m. anyway, so he figured he'd step in for some family members who were away at a wedding in Brandon and couldn't make their shifts.

It turns out Trotz is really proud of his Ukrainian roots. When he brought the Stanley Cup to Dauphin in 2018 after winning it with the Washington Capitals, his parade was accompanied by a traditional vintage Ukrainian honor guard, complete with members of Canada's National Riding and Dancing Cossacks. If it were any more Eastern European, Yosh and Stan Shmenge would've shown up. (Google it, kids.) When Trotz is asked about his heritage, his response is, "You can't tell by this round face?"

Doubtless, there were several patrons who did a double-take when they realized who their bartender was. Then again, in a town of about 8,000, maybe not. But there were more than a few who congratulated

him on his fine work on free-agent day, when Trotz made Nashville as desirable a destination for big-time hockey stars as it is for bachelorette parties.

Steven Stamkos, man, that was a big get. So were Jonathan Marchessault and Brady Skjei. Preventing defenseman Alexandre Carrier – signed to a three-year deal worth $3.75 million per season – from hitting the open market was also a tidy bit of business. And hey, if you're in for a bazillion, you might as well extend goalie Juuse Saros – who, for months, seemed on his way out of town – to an eight-year contract extension that's worth $7.7 million per season and kicks in next fall.

But it was the acquisition of Stamkos that generated most of the excitement and best represented the Predators' reversal of fortunes. A year ago, with Mattias Ekholm, Tanner Jeannot and Mikael Granlund all dealt within a week of the 2023 trade deadline, neither Trotz nor the Predators were pulling the wool over anyone's eyes. "I was very transparent with everybody when I took the job," Trotz said. "We tried to burn it down."

But now, just months after overachieving in the regular season and then again in the playoffs, Nashville has pivoted and is accumulating the assets to be a legitimate contender in both the short and long term.

It all kind of started in late May when blueliner Ryan McDonagh asked for a trade back to Tampa Bay – something the Lightning were only too happy to make happen, even without Nashville retaining any salary. That's when Trotz began tapping his fingers together. "I tried to do (McDonagh) a solid," Trotz said. "But I didn't think it was happening, because I thought, 'If they can't fit Stamkos in, I don't know how they're going to fit him in.' But (Tampa Bay GM) Julien (BriseBois) said, 'Yeah, I want Ryan McDonagh back, and I'll figure it out.' "

However it all went down, there is no doubt that Trotz swung for the fences. Even though Stamkos was the biggest name to land in Smashville, Trotz emphasized that his most important off-season task was to replace the departed McDonagh. And he did so by offering Skjei a seven-year deal worth $49 million ($7-million AAV). In case you hadn't noticed, Skjei put up the best point total of his career last season with the Carolina Hurricanes. And don't let the premature grey fool you, he's five years younger than McDonagh, costs only $250,000 more per season and has far fewer miles on him.

In Marchessault, the Predators are getting a man who won the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP in 2023. He went from misfit to star, an undersized guy who was never drafted. And given that he was seemingly cast aside by the Vegas Golden Knights, the Preds are also getting someone who will likely come into Smashville with a chip on his shoulder. After signing with Nashville, Marchessault was asked where things went sideways in Vegas, particularly when it seemed for a long time as though he was going to re-sign there. "I don't think it was close," Marchessault said. "I think it was intriguing, the concept they were offering, but it wasn't close. I don't think I was interested in something like that. I was definitely really upset the day before July 1."

In Stamkos, the Predators are getting quite simply the most prolific offensive player they've had in franchise history. He's a sure-fire Hall of Famer, a 500-goal scorer, a two-time Stanley Cup winner and someone who can seemingly score 30 goals while falling out of bed in the morning. And all he has to do is play the games, so that's a relief. After all, the Predators are paying him 32 million big ones ($8-million AAV) over the next four years to do just that.

Well, OK, scoring a bunch, providing veteran leadership, goosing a power play that couldn't shoot straight in the playoffs and drawing on his championship pedigree to lead the way are all part of the job description as well. But it's fair to say that Stamkos' major contributions in Nashville will largely be restricted to what he does on the ice. "We shouldn't be afraid to be a little bold and say, 'Listen, we believe we can be a

TROTZ SPENDS LOTS

The Preds GM gave out more than $180 million on Day 1 of free agency to vault his team to contender status.

TOP: CHRISTOPHER HANEWINCKEL-USA TODAY SPORTS; BOTTOM: DAVID KIROUAC-USA TODAY SPORTS

contending team,' " Stamkos said. "On paper, it looks that way. When I see the roster, I think we can be a contender."

We're not exactly sure what the Predators will turn out to be with Stamkos and Co., but they will be must-see TV. However, thanks in part to the free-agent additions Trotz has made the past two summers, the real action will be in the family room before and after games and between periods. For starters, Marchessault and Ryan

"WE SHOULDN'T BE AFRAID TO BE A LITTLE BOLD AND SAY, 'LISTEN, WE BELIEVE WE CAN BE A CONTENDING TEAM' – Steven Stamkos

JOHN E. SOKOLOWSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS

Though he says leaving Tampa Bay was "extremely difficult," Stamkos is excited for a new start in Nashville.

O'Reilly both have four kids. Stamkos, Luke Schenn and Gustav Nyquist each have three. Nashville staple Roman Josi has two, and fellow pillar Filip Forsberg became a father for the first time a week after the Predators lost Game 6 to fall to the Vancouver Canucks in the first round last spring. Except for Marchessault's 10-year-old son, the other children are all under eight. "You wouldn't want to be babysitting all those kids while the game is going on," Stamkos said. "They've just got to build a little rink for the kids and let them go at it."

But there's a little more to all of this. By and large, the Predators' core is made up of players who are now either in their late 20s or early 30s. Some have reached the pinnacle in terms of both individual and team success (Stamkos, O'Reilly and Marchessault), and others have had their share of personal triumph (Josi and Forsberg) and either have a pretty good idea of what it takes to win or know the formula unequivocally. They still all look to have at least a few more years of productivity, barring injury. And they'll be focused on two tasks: winning hockey games and caring for their families. There's not much chance you'll find any of them howling at the moon outside a honky-tonk on Lower Broadway.

For Stamkos, he quickly realized what possibilities might await this group, but there was still pain and disappointment that came with the rejection from the Bolts.

When you're in the same place for 16 years, you don't have to find new schools and hockey teams for your kids. If anything comes up at home, you have somebody who can take care of it. And you're comfortable

KEEP 'EM COMING

Two-time Cup champ Stamkos arrives in Nashville looking to add to his already stuffed trophy case.

in the community. Stamkos has been very open about how challenging it has been to leave Tampa Bay, particularly since he made it clear he wanted to end his career there. As he and his family packed their belongings for the move to Nashville, the remnants of Hurricane Debby were making their way through Tampa, which was perhaps a little fitting.

In Nashville, Stamkos will only have to worry about the odd tornado, but it didn't take long for him to realize the southern hospitality the area offers will play well for him and his family. "I'm not going to lie and say it wasn't difficult," Stamkos said. "Because it was. It was extremely difficult. When you're making a decision that impacts your young family, there's a little more at stake there than just my feelings and what I want. That's what I struggled with. As a human, you're allowed to have that process, and then you start to get excited. You start thinking of reasons and telling yourself why you made the right decision, not questioning the decision. And that has been our mindset ever since we got to Nashville."

On the ice, Stamkos is no longer a frontrunner for the Rocket Richard Trophy, but is it possible we've taken for granted just what an elite goal-scorer he still is at 34? On the power play last season, only Sam Reinhart and Leon Draisaitl scored more than Stamkos' 19 PP goals, and only seven players eclipsed his 39 power-play points. The Preds had a middling power play in 2023-24, but it went dry in the playoffs with just two goals on 22 attempts. In their final game of the post-season, Game 6 against the Canucks, Nashville went 0-for-3 in a 1-0 loss.

"Going into last season, I thought we were going to be near the bottom of the league in scoring goals, but we finished 10th, and that was a credit to the players and (coach) Andrew (Brunette)," Trotz said. "And we saw in the Vancouver series that we were right with them 5-on-5. It was on the special teams that they beat us. So I said, 'We've got to get that part of our game closer.' So, all of a sudden, we now have a power play with O'Reilly in the middle and Marchessault at the net, Stamkos on one flank and Forsberg on the other and Josi up top."

Last season, Stamkos was downright lethal on the power play. Of the 19 goals he scored with the extra man, all but one came from the left circle, with him shooting on his off wing. The other came about a foot outside it. Opponents had every expectation it was coming, and yet they were powerless to stop it. While Stamkos won't have reigning scoring champion Nikita Kucherov – who earned eight primary assists and nine secondary helpers on Stamkos' PP goals last season – feeding him those precise and feathery passes anymore, you get the sense Stamkos will find a way to make it work regardless.

But it might be a little different, because when Stamkos was on the power play with Tampa Bay, there was no doubt who the go-to guy was when it came to putting the puck in the back of the net. Kucherov, Victor Hedman and Brayden Point are all first-class set-up men, but both Forsberg and Marchessault were 40-goal scorers last season, too. "You look at the talent that's there, and you have one of the best guys to run a power play in Josi, and it's pretty similar to what I had in Tampa with Hedman," Stamkos said. "There's a lot of potential there. When you bring in guys like Marchessault and myself, you definitely want to put us in positions to

TOP: NATHAN RAY SEEBECK-USA TODAY SPORTS; BOTTOM: SERGEI BELSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS

PERRY NELSON-USA TODAY SPORTS

“IT WAS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. WHEN YOU’RE MAKING A DECISION THAT IMPACTS YOUR YOUNG FAMILY, THERE’S A LITTLE MORE AT STAKE – Steven Stamkos

succeed. We’re both really good on the power play and putting the puck in the net, and we’re excited about those possibilities.”

Given the way the top line of O’Reilly between Forsberg and Nyquist played last season, there would be little sense in splitting them up, so that likely leaves a second unit with Tommy Novak between Stamkos and Marchessault. Josi and Skjei can be written down in indelible ink as the No. 1 defense pairing, with the tough-as-nails and sneaky-good Jeremy Lauzon playing with Carrier on the second pair. By any measure, that’s one of the best top-two five-man units you’ll find anywhere in the NHL.

And none of this would have happened if not for a team outing to a U2 concert in Las Vegas being cancelled because the Predators were playing so poorly. The team had lost five of six games before All-Star Weekend, then dropped two of their first three coming out of the respite, including a 9-2 loss to the Dallas Stars on home ice. After that loss, Trotz and Brunette decided to cancel the night at The Sphere, where 40 tickets were waiting for them.

Trotz remembers the Predators could have punished him by showing him just how bad they could really be, or they could regroup. To that point, the Preds had been all over the map in terms of their play, but after the cancellation, they won 16 of 18 games, and the two games they lost were in extra time. That vaulted them from being sellers at the trade deadline and into the playoff race. Had they not turned their game around, Trotz would have continued to burn it down, and everything this summer might have looked different.

The Predators were excited about the young players they had in their system, but they also had the cap space and the opportunity to pick up elite free agents. The off-season overhaul will allow those young guys to develop at a slower pace, and, at the same time, it will accelerate the retool. “We started to say, ‘Why waste years of Roman Josi? Why waste years of our elite players?’ ” Trotz said. “And you might say these guys would be OK with a rebuild, but guys want to win. The elite guys will knock on your door and say, ‘I want to win before my career is done.’ These guys have earned this, so let’s take a shot at it.”

Trotz (and Stamkos for that matter) is quick to point out that the changes are fantasy hockey until the Predators actually hit the ice and start to become what they’re going to be. On paper, this team will certainly be more dangerous.

In Stamkos, Marchessault and O’Reilly, they have players on their roster who have won four of the past six Stanley Cups. They have depth at every position. And they are primed to do under Trotz what they were never able to do when David Poile was running their hockey operations: win the Stanley Cup. “Listen, that’s where it falls on us to get this group that is really intriguing and interesting and fun on paper to play like a team,” Stamkos said. “We want to come in and just fit in seamlessly to the mindset those guys had last year and just keep getting better.” H

STRUCK BY LIGHTNING

After nearly eight seasons in Pittsburgh and a brief sojourn in Carolina, **JAKE GUENTZEL** is taking his goal-scoring talents to Tampa Bay, where the Lightning are trying to keep their championship window open **BY CAROL SCHRAM**

SERGEI BELSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS

ON THE SURFACE, IT was a summer like any other for Jake Guentzel. Lots of quality time with family on the shores of Lake Elmo in Minnesota, with Jake's parents and his older brothers, Gabe and Ryan, all close by.

"It's where we grew up," Guentzel said. "My workout is 10 minutes away, and skating is pretty close, too. I come back here every summer, to Minnesota, and just kind of hang out."

At two years old, Jake's son, Charlie, remains blissfully unaware of the thunderstorm that's brewing for his family. Instead of heading back to Pittsburgh, where Jake carved out his place as one of the NHL's best left wingers over the past eight seasons, a new chapter is about to begin with the Tampa Bay Lightning.

After the Carolina Hurricanes traded his rights to the Lightning on June 30 in exchange for a third-round pick, Guentzel cashed in one day later, signing a seven-year, $63-million deal ($9-million AAV). "I really think we have a chance to do something special," he said. "My family and I are excited to get down there. We really can't wait to get going."

Drafted in the third round (77th overall) in 2013 out of USHL Sioux City, Guentzel spent three years developing his game at NCAA Nebraska-Omaha before joining AHL Wilkes-Barre/Scranton in the spring of 2016. During the 2016 AHL playoffs, he led the Baby Pens with 14 points in 10 games.

A week after Wilkes-Barre/Scranton lost its seven-game battle against the Hershey Bears, Guentzel flew into Pittsburgh for Game 5 of the 2016 Eastern Conference final. That night, it was none other than the Lightning who took a 3-2 series lead against the eventual Cup champs thanks to Tyler Johnson's overtime goal. "The atmosphere was unbelievable," Guentzel said. "There's nothing like playoffs."

The next day, he inked his first NHL contract, and by the middle of 2016-17, Guentzel had staked a permanent claim on the stall next to Sidney Crosby's in the Penguins' dressing room.

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WARRIOR
COVERT

JAKE GUENTZEL

That June, Pittsburgh became the first team to win back-to-back Cups since the 1997 and 1998 Detroit Red Wings. Guentzel led his star-laden squad with 13 goals. In the process, he became the first rookie ever to lead the NHL in playoff goal-scoring.

Since Guentzel scored twice in his NHL debut against the New York Rangers on Nov. 21, 2016, his 227 goals place him 20th overall in the league, and his 491 points in 520 games rank 29th.

Among American-born players, he sits fourth in goals and sixth in points over the same time frame. That positions him well to earn a spot with Team USA as NHL players return to international competition with the 4 Nations Face-Off in 2025 and the Winter Olympics in Italy in 2026. "There's a lot of high-end players for us, and it's obviously going to be a challenge," Guentzel said. "A lot of guys are going to be fighting for spots. You've got to make sure you come into the season hot and playing well and do whatever it takes to make that team."

The competition is fierce. Matthew Tkachuk has already been named to America's 4 Nations roster, and Team USA's GM Bill Guerin can round out his left side with Guentzel, Jason Robertson, Chris Kreider and Kyle Connor, or he could shift other talents over from center or right wing.

Many of those players have a history with USA Hockey from the world juniors, the World Championship or the National Team Development Program. For Guentzel, a roster nod in 2025 or 2026 would be his first opportunity to suit up for his country. "That's obviously a dream, to play for Team USA," he said.

IMPACT PLAYER

Guentzel ranks among the top 20 NHL goal-scorers and is top 30 in points since his big-league debut.

As successful as Guentzel was in his time with the Penguins, he often operated in the shadow of stars Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Kris Letang.

But last spring, Guentzel's profile spiked to new heights as he became the top rental option at the NHL trade deadline, approaching unrestricted free agency after failing to reach an agreement with the Penguins on a long-term contract extension.

Though a mid-February injury left him with broken ribs and a torn oblique muscle as the deadline approached, teams clamored to add Guentzel.

One day before the March 8 trade deadline, the Hurricanes won the bidding war, sending Pittsburgh a package that included as many as six pieces, including a potential

JOHN E. SOKOLOWSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS

first-round draft pick. That pick became a second-rounder when Carolina failed to advance to the 2024 Stanley Cup final.

On March 12, Guentzel debuted with his new team in a 1-0 loss to the Rangers, but business quickly picked up from there. Finding immediate chemistry on the top line with Sebastian Aho and Seth Jarvis, Guentzel piled up 25 points in 17 regular-season games, then added another nine points in 11 playoff games.

His performance left no doubt that he could deliver high-end offense outside of the Penguins' environment. As a result, teams chased hard again before July 1. The Lightning decided it was worth acquiring his rights to ensure they got their man.

"You're not really sure how it's going to go in a new spot," Guentzel said. "For me to go play in Carolina, to have a little success there, definitely gave me confidence as a player and a person."

Guentzel won't have to fret about returning to Pittsburgh on the visiting side. That moment came just over two weeks after his trade to Carolina.

With the memory of his performances in the black-and-yellow still fresh in their minds, Penguins fans rose to their feet to show their respect as Guentzel's tribute video rolled during the first period on March 26, 2024. (The Penguins went on to defeat the Hurricanes 4-1.)

Guentzel was held off the scoresheet that night. But, practically speaking, the timing worked out well. "My family just stayed there, cleaned up the house, and got that all sort of situated," he said. "Then, they were out in Raleigh the rest of the time."

Though Guentzel was born in Nebraska, his roots run deep in the State of Hockey. He was a rink rat while his father, Mike, served as an assistant and associate coach with the Golden Gophers at the University of Minnesota for nearly two decades. When Jake reached high school, he followed his brothers into the hockey program at the Hill-Murray School in Maplewood, Minn.

Growing up, one of his brothers' hockey pals was Ryan McDonagh. He's now part of Guentzel's summer skating group and is headed back to Tampa Bay for a second tour of duty with the Lightning. "It's nice to have someone, especially here in Minnesota, that I'll skate with, that I can talk to and just kind of teach me the way down there," Guentzel said. "It'll be good to have someone to lean on."

And after working with two of the top coaches in the game in Mike Sullivan and Rod Brind'Amour, Guentzel will now be guided by another widely respected bench boss in Jon Cooper. "I've heard nothing but unbelievable things about him, his demeanor and how smart he is about the game," Guentzel said. "I can't wait to learn from him and get to know him a little bit more."

Over the years, Guentzel has soaked up guidance from other local hockey minds. Thomas Vanek and Alex Stalock introduced him to ETS Sports Performance – a chain of fitness facilities tailored to high-level athletes of all ages across multiple sports. "I was looking for something new going into my third year," Guentzel said. "I knew Thomas Vanek for a while, and he said he was working out there. Ever since then, I haven't gone anywhere else. It's been great."

JOHN E. SOKOLOWSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS

> **"THAT'S OBVIOUSLY A DREAM, TO PLAY FOR TEAM USA"**
>
> – Jake Guentzel, on the NHL 4 Nations Face-Off

It won't be all new faces in the Sunshine State. Current Lightning players Conor Sheary and Derrick Pouliot also got their starts in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, and defenseman Nick Perbix is an Elk River, Minn., native who, like Guentzel and McDonagh, is a regular in Minnesota's Da Beauty League (which features NHLers, NCAA players and other hockey elite playing some recreational summer puck).

A year ago, Guentzel became an ETS partner. "Here we are now – we have a gym in Minnesota together," he said. "What I like about it is, it's not just one-dimensional. It gives you everything you need in all sports, and they really specialize it for each and every athlete."

Guentzel turns 30 in October, so his summer training now focuses primarily on functional movement and strengthening key areas to help prevent potential injuries. "You want to help your body, especially as you get older," he said.

It has been seven years since the then-22-year-old rookie brought the Stanley Cup back to Minnesota, visiting his youth-hockey rink in Woodbury along with a local restaurant and golf course. He's eager to do it again. "I've just got to come in and make sure I'm playing my best, at a high level," Guentzel said. "There's a lot of high-end players there. So wherever you play, you're with good players."

If his plan succeeds, Lightning may strike again next spring. H

JAKE DEBRUSK

VANCOUVER CANUCKS • VANCOUVER CANUCKS • VANCOUVER C

WEST

MARC DESROSIERS-USA TODAY SPORTS

JAKE DEBRUSK'S return to Western Canada wasn't ordained. But it made a lot of sense, all things considered

BY CAROL SCHRAM

FROM THE HOWES TO the Hulls to the Tkachuks and on down the line, hockey fans have seen literally hundreds of sons follow their fathers into the sport. But family ties bind in a unique way for Jake DeBrusk. The 27-year-old navigated seven NHL seasons with the Boston Bruins while his father, Louie, served up opinions as an Edmonton-based TV hockey analyst.

When Jake scored his first NHL goal in his first game on Oct. 5, 2017, his father, a once-feared NHL enforcer, became a social-media meme when he wiped away a proud tear with the back of his hand while watching from the stands at TD Garden.

Four months later, in Jake's first-ever visit to Vancouver as an NHL rookie, Louie sat down with his son and Scott Oake on *Hockey Night in Canada's* After Hours. Dad may have committed a classic parental overshare when Louie confessed that he and his wife, Cindy, had fudged the numbers for their late-blooming 14-year-old when he entered the WHL bantam draft in 2011.

"We listed him at 5-foot-2, 125 (pounds)," Louie said. "I think he was more like 4-foot-11, 110 (pounds). We just figured he'd be that size by the draft, which I think he was fairly close. Anything you can do to kind of push him in the right direction, right?"

When Jake reached free agency on July 1, he chose Western Canada as his home for the next seven years when he signed a $38.5-million contract with the Vancouver Canucks. "Being closer to home, to get to see (family) more, is something I took into consideration," Jake said. "We're pretty excited."

After last spring's seven-game series between the Canucks and Edmonton Oilers, the hockey rivalry between DeBrusk's new stomping grounds and his hometown is perhaps the hottest it's ever been. And while the 2011 Stanley Cup final between the Canucks and Bruins happened when he was just a young teenager thinking about that bantam draft, he's aware former teammate Brad Marchand remains a supervillain every time he comes out west.

"In terms of the rivalry, there's a little bit of that with the fans," he said. "Especially with 'Marsh.' It was always interesting seeing how people reacted around him, which I totally understand."

A little lingering bad blood wasn't enough to stop DeBrusk from embracing the opportunity to ply his trade in the bright spotlight of a Canadian market, on an up-and-coming team where his skill set should be a good fit. "They're hard to play against," DeBrusk said of his new club. "The biggest thing for me is, obviously, looking at the centermen. I think that's a great opportunity for me to come in and excel. They've got lots of punch there."

J.T. Miller and Elias Pettersson are the Canucks' elite middlemen. On July 1, Vancouver GM Patrik Allvin complimented his new winger's speed, two-way dependability and positional versatility and said he expects DeBrusk to line up with Pettersson in October.

Vancouver took a big step forward last season, capturing the Pacific Division title and reaching the playoffs for the first time in four years. The Canucks' management and coaching ranks are filled with

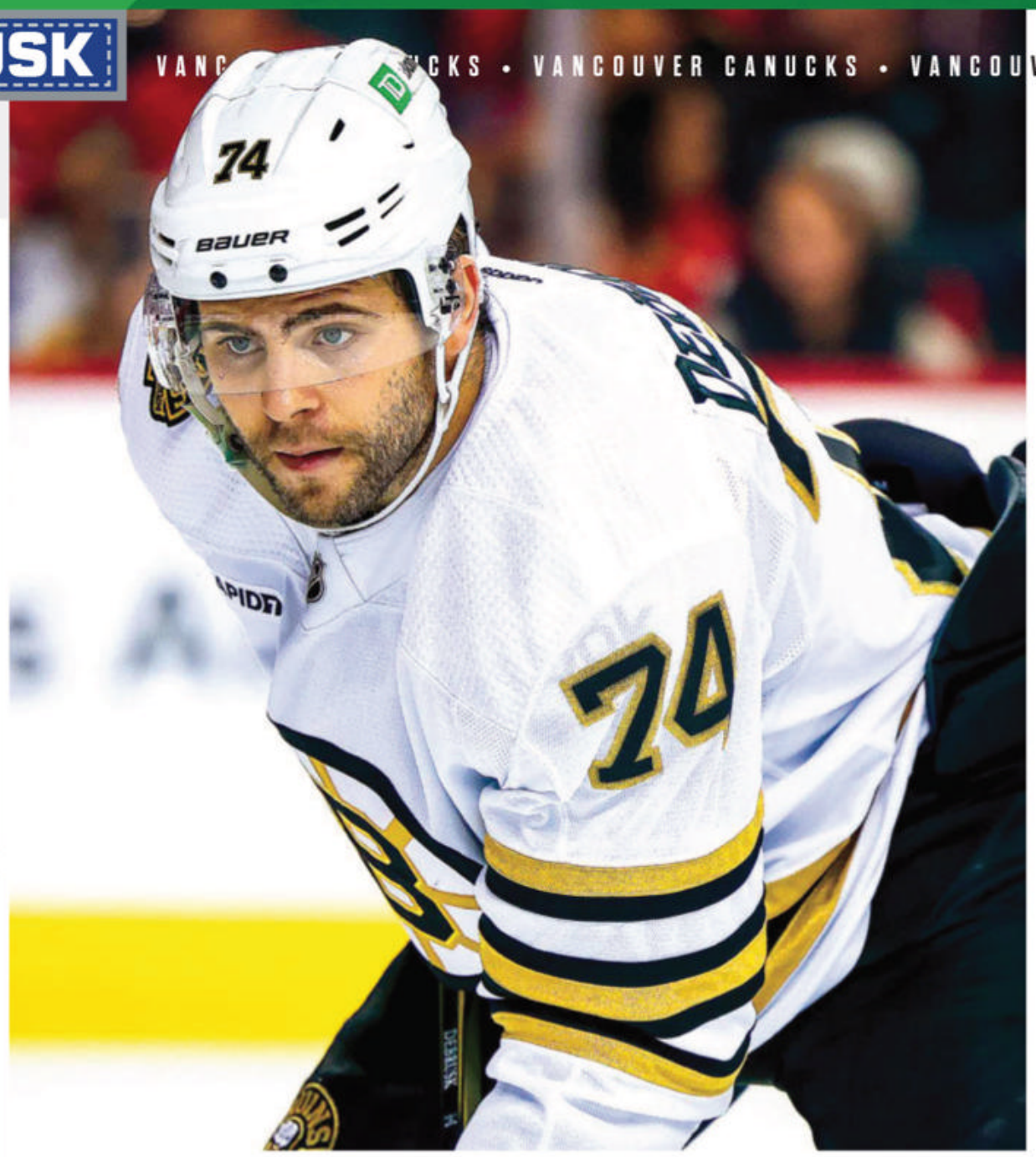
JAKE DEBRUSK

Cup champs, including coach Rick Tocchet and assistants Adam Foote and Sergei Gonchar, who all won as players.

But last spring's roster was a little short on post-season experience, and the acquisition of DeBrusk helps in that regard. The Bruins made the playoffs in all seven of his NHL seasons. He reached Game 7 of the Stanley Cup final in 2019 and has 47 points in 86 career post-season games. He's been good, too. "What I've seen over the years, I think Jake has consistently been able to elevate his game in the playoffs," Allvin said.

Now a solid 6-foot-1 and nearly 200 pounds, DeBrusk learned to rely on speed, skill and determination in his youth. Though his dad punched in at 6-foot-2 and 227 pounds during his playing days, Jake was the smallest player on his teams growing up, and he was devastated when he didn't make the cut to play in Edmonton's famed Brick Tournament at age 10.

His dad's white lie about his size may have helped him claim a seventh-round bantam-draft selection by the Swift Current Broncos, but he didn't play his first WHL game until he was nearly 17.



LATE BLOOMER

DeBrusk got some help from father Louie when he was standing on the scale prior to the WHL bantam draft.

TOP: SERGEI BELSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS; BOTTOM: PERRY NELSON-USA TODAY SPORTS

> **I THINK THAT'S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO COME IN AND EXCEL. THEY'VE GOT LOTS OF PUNCH THERE** – Jake DeBrusk

Born 32 days after the NHL's Sept. 15 draft-year cutoff, DeBrusk benefitted enormously from the extra year of development that his "late" birthday afforded. In his 2014-15 draft year, he exploded for 42 goals and 81 points, earned a spot at the CHL's Top Prospects Game and worked his way into the conversation as a potential first-rounder. (The Hockey News had him ranked 28th.)

On draft day in Sunrise, Fla., he was listed at 5-foot-11 and 174 pounds. Boston GM Don Sweeney took him with the 14th pick.

DeBrusk spent one more year in junior, then transitioned seamlessly to the pro game. When he joined the AHL's Providence Bruins at 20, he tied for second in team scoring with 49 points in 74 games. Then, in the playoffs, he chipped in six goals as the Bruins upset the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins and the Hershey Bears on their way to the AHL's Eastern Conference final.

The playoff hero for Providence that year? Danton Heinen, with 18 points. Now 29, Heinen made the jump to Boston with DeBrusk in 2017-18, then found his way back to the Bruins last season. On July 1, Heinen joined DeBrusk and another former B's teammate, Derek Forbort, in signing with Vancouver.

"I already texted J.D. and said, 'Where are you buying us a house?' " laughed Forbort.

During his time in Boston, DeBrusk developed under the mentorship of elite leaders such as Zdeno Chara and Patrice Bergeron. He was a fixture on the power play from Day 1, then began to see penalty-killing minutes the past couple of years.

In 2022-23, the Canucks ranked dead last while shorthanded. Last season, they climbed into the middle of the pack, but they're looking for more improvement. DeBrusk, Forbort and Heinen will all be able to help.

"I got asked if I'd do it because I have speed and a good stick," DeBrusk said. "I think I'm effective (on the penalty kill). I'm still learning the defensive side of the game. Being around a guy like Patrice Bergeron, I have a lot of respect for him. I really leaned on him when I first started penalty killing."

While collecting 1,161 PIM in 401 NHL games over 11 seasons, Louie DeBrusk dropped the gloves against tough-guy legends of the 1990s including Marty McSorley, Gino Odjick, Stu Grimson – and Tocchet. In 1998, the pair became allies as teammates with the Phoenix Coyotes. That was more than a quarter-century ago.

Jake was just two at the time, so his impressions of his new coach have been formed largely by what Louie has shared over the years. "I heard lots of good things," he said. "I trust my dad. They played together, so obviously, he wasn't coaching, but I think his track record speaks for itself. Anytime you can come into a place like that with a coach like that, you know you can get better."

And when Sportsnet's broadcast schedule aligns, Louie will have a front-row view from between the benches.

BRIAN FLUHARTY-USA TODAY SPORTS

WESTERN WINGMAN

DeBrusk is sure to have plenty of goal celebrations in a Canucks jersey playing alongside Pettersson.

KRAKEN OPEN DOORS

When Seattle takes the ice this season, **JESSICA CAMPBELL** will become the first woman to step behind an NHL bench as an assistant coach. But the milestone should take a back seat to why she's been such a fast riser and what impact she could have on her team and the game as a whole **BY JARED CLINTON**

PHOTO BY COACHELLA VALLEY FIREBIRDS

TOM ROWE ISN'T AFRAID to admit when he's at a loss.

Rowe has been around the block. He's a veteran of more than 350 NHL games as a player. He's worked in big-league front offices since the early 1990s, when he was assistant GM of the Hartford Whalers. He's pulled double duty as architect and coach of AHL teams. He has a Stanley Cup on his resume as part of the Carolina Hurricanes' 2006 title-winning team. And as recently as 2016-17, he was patrolling an NHL bench as coach of the Florida Panthers.

With that much experience, Rowe knows enough to know that he doesn't know it all – which brings us to his first season as coach of the German League's Nuremberg Ice Tigers. New to the circuit in 2021-22, Rowe found himself nearing his wit's end. His club was fighting for a playoff spot, and at one of the most important points of the campaign, try as he might, he couldn't get his team to capitalize with the man advantage. That's about the time his phone rang. On the line was Jessica Campbell.

That first conversation began with dialogue about the defensive side of the game, specifically the penalty kill. Rowe liked what he heard and was intrigued by Campbell's ideas, but given his conundrum, he shifted the discussion. "I said, 'I really love what you're saying on PK, but are you well-versed on offense?' " Rowe said. "She said she loved the offensive side of the game, and I said, 'Well, good, because I can't get our power play going, so maybe you can.' "

One thing led to another, and in short order, Campbell was no longer simply diagramming and presenting her ideas to Rowe, she was explaining them to the Ice Tigers staff and players. So impressed was Rowe with Campbell that he asked her to step behind the bench. Her stay was brief – only a few games – but her impact was evident. "I think we had six power plays when she was there," Rowe said, "and we scored on three of them."

TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN

> **I FELT LIKE WHAT I WAS TEACHING, WHAT I WAS WORKING WITH THEM ON, WAS TRANSLATING AND HITTING IN A DIFFERENT WAY** – Jessica Campbell

When Dan Bylsma and the Kraken named Campbell part of Seattle's new-look coaching staff for this season, the 32-year-old Campbell became the first woman to assume a full-time assistant coach's role behind the bench at the NHL level. It's all old hat for her at this point. Campbell had already become the first woman to claim a full-time assistant role in the AHL in 2022, when she was named part of Bylsma's staff with the Kraken's top affiliate, the Coachella Valley Firebirds. But what is often lost in talk about Campbell is that none of that is even close to the most interesting part of her story. Rather, it's her meteoric rise.

It was only in 2020 that Campbell, who won a silver as part of Team Canada at the 2015 World Championship, closed the book on her playing days. Though she'd first announced her retirement in 2017 after three seasons with the CWHL's Calgary Inferno and four years in a starring role at Cornell, Campbell had briefly returned for an 11-game run with Swedish side Malmo during 2019-20.

BURNING BRIGHT

In each of Campbell's two seasons with the AHL's Firebirds, the team reached the Calder Cup final.

In the interim, Campbell began her transition off the ice, taking on assistant-coaching posts with elite girl's prep programs in British Columbia, first in Kelowna and later in Penticton.

But it was only as her on-ice career was wrapping up for good that Campbell dove headfirst into coaching. She struck out on her own to create JC Powerskating, a skating and skill-development business. And in June 2020, as players prepped to return from the pandemic shutdown, Campbell's client list was growing. Beyond former national-team pals such as Natalie Spooner and Blayre Turnbull, she found herself working with the likes of Mathew Barzal, Joel Edmundson and Damon Severson.

But it was working with Brent Seabrook, the former Chicago Blackhawks defenseman who was trying to rehab career-threatening injuries, that changed everything. "I realized this is what I want to do," Campbell said at her introductory press conference. "These guys are showing up for my skates in numbers, and maybe I want to pursue this goal in a different light, get behind the bench. I felt like what I was teaching, what I was working with them on, was translating and hitting in a different way, and it definitely inspired me to think (coaching in the NHL) could be a potential goal of mine."

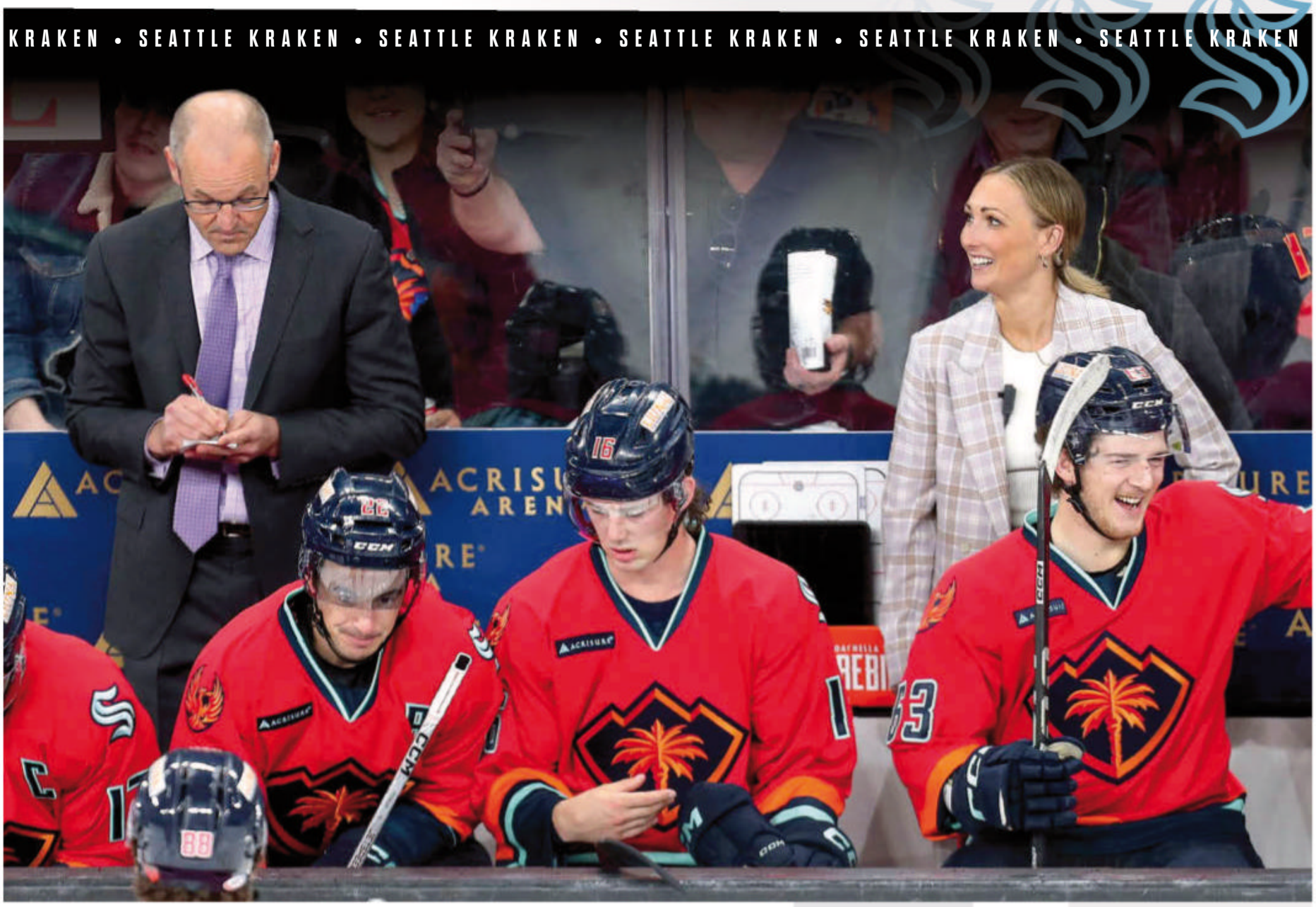
And while she hasn't taken a direct route to her dream, her path hasn't been all that far from it.

By the time 2020-21 rolled around, Campbell was back in Malmo, this time as a skating coach for the men's team. All the while, she was setting up individual skates and camps. The following season, she headed up the Windy City Storm girl's program in Chicago and, eventually, she made the fateful call to Rowe. The impression she made opened more doors.

Rowe tried but failed to keep Campbell on board – "We pushed ownership real hard to try to hire her," he said – so he began calling around to find her work. Ultimately, Rowe connected her with then-German national-team coach Toni Soderholm, who brought her aboard for the 2022 World Championship. That, too, saw Campbell make history: she was the first woman to coach at the men's tournament. And it caught the eyes of those in big-league circles.

First, in June 2022, Campbell was offered a spot as a guest coach at the New York Rangers' development camp. Then, weeks later, Bylsma called Rowe. Having just been named coach of the Kraken's nascent AHL club, Bylsma was looking to round out his staff. He wanted to know more about Campbell. "I said, 'Dan, once you see her in action,' " Rowe said, " 'I will promise you this: she'll be in the NHL within two years.' "

TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN



JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

If there is any secret to Campbell's success, it's her ability to communicate and connect – and leverage those talents to improve those around her.

For Rowe, he saw a knack for clear and concise instruction in Campbell. She was, to him, a coach who understands the modern player. They want to know what and how, yes, but also why. "Players, if they listen to her and do the things that she's trying to teach them, and I don't care if you've been in the NHL for 10 years, you're going to learn something from her and be a better hockey player," Rowe said.

Bylsma echoed a similar sentiment on the day his staff was introduced, adding: "Her ability to establish relationships with players, work with them to improve on their game and work with them to be better players was a reason why, two years ago, I got the opportunity to work with Jess."

Her handiwork has already been evident.

Tye Kartye came into the Kraken organization as an undrafted free agent, and he has, in two seasons, gone from a surprising AHL standout to a bottom-six fixture in Seattle. Likewise, 2021 second-rounder Ryker Evans has benefitted from working with Campbell, elevating his game in short order and earning consistent second-pairing big-league minutes starting in the back half of last season. Campbell has also played a role in Seattle's patient development approach with 2022 No. 4 overall pick Shane Wright.

It's clear, too, she understands how to connect with these players. "I think every young player, they want to make an impact, and they want to use their ability to fit into the team regardless of what role they're asked to play," Campbell said. "That's the opportunity for young players, to embrace that role regardless of what minutes or special teams they're handed."

It surely helps that Campbell can empathize with the upstart mindset. There are indeed parallels between the up-and-comers she's helped elevate and her willingness to accept smaller but no less important gigs to get her to where she is today. "There's been success, and there's been hardship," she said. "Dan's been a huge mentor for me. From the very beginning in our first conversation following (the 2022) World Championship, I knew what I wanted to do as a coach, but I didn't know what was next as a coach and where I would fit and how those opportunities might come."

The question now is whether Campbell's presence behind an NHL bench will pave the way for others.

It wasn't long ago that Emilie Castonguay earning her spot as assistant GM of the Vancouver Canucks led to a wave of women being elevated to that role. In the wake of Castonguay's hiring in January 2022, Cammi Granato joined her as assistant GM with the Canucks in February, followed by the Chicago Blackhawks elevating Meghan Hunter to the assistant GM post that June. By July, the Toronto Maple Leafs had moved Hayley Wickenheiser into the assistant job, and the New Jersey Devils had brought aboard Kate Madigan to assume the role. Then, the Kraken promoted Alex Mandrycky, who was, in 2019, among the expansion franchise's first front-office hires, to assistant GM in September.

MOVIN' ON UP

Bylsma and Campbell will try to replicate their AHL coaching success in the NHL with the Kraken.

While Campbell isn't the first woman to become a full-time NHL coach – the Washington Capitals' Emily Engel-Natzke has that honor, joining the team as its video coordinator in June 2022 – the Kraken's high-profile hire hopes her effort, attitude and a dash of on-ice results ensure she isn't the last. "It puts a lot of meaning into the work," Campbell said. "I know that if the team has success and that my impact is a good one, then it could potentially open up doors for others and open eyes for others to maybe think differently. But I guess I try to really just keep my eyes fixed on what matters every day, to be in the now, be in the moment, and stay in the trenches with the players. And though I am honored to be the first, I don't want to be the only." H

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PERRY NELSON-USA TODAY SPORTS

SEATTLE KRAKEN

TOUR DE FORCE

Fresh off a Stanley Cup in Florida, Brandon Montour had 50 million reasons to head west – not to mention the promise of a prominent place in Seattle's game plan **BY WILL MACLAREN**

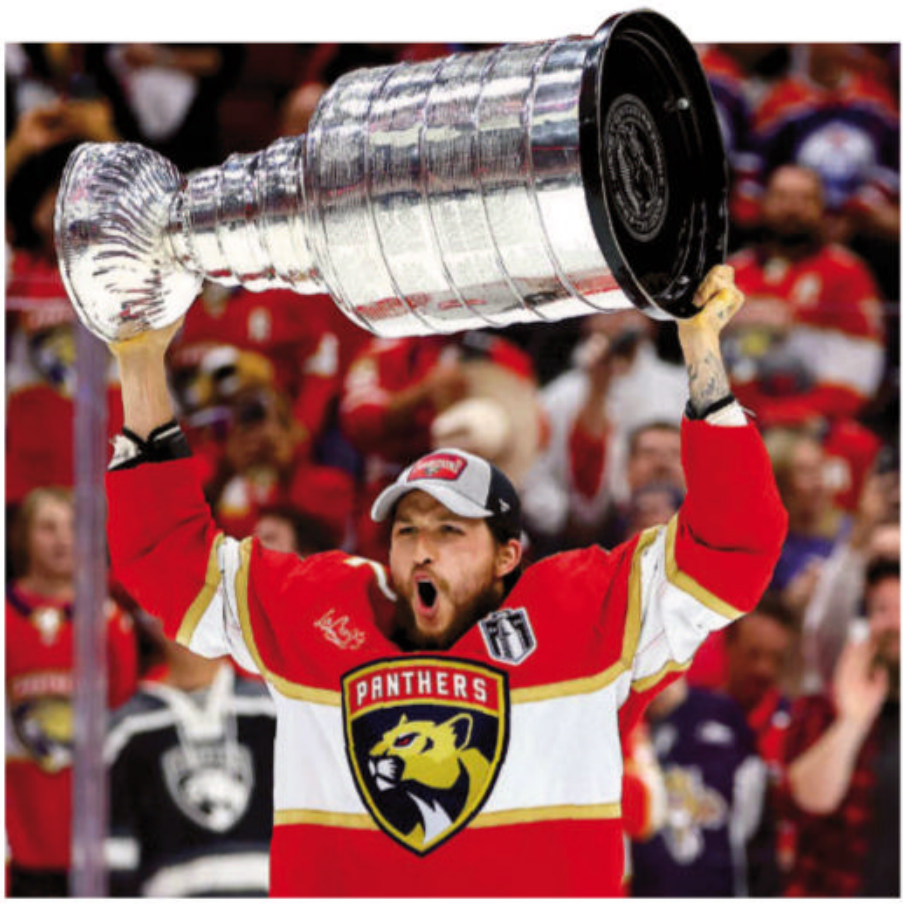
WHEN YOU'VE experienced three NHL stops in eight seasons, taking on a change of address is familiar territory. But when you take it to the level that Brandon Montour recently did – from winning a Stanley Cup in sunny Florida to embracing a decidedly different landscape roughly 3,300 miles away in the span of seven days – it should come with a healthy dose of stability.

Stability is something the 30-year-old defenseman has finally earned thanks to a seven-year, $50-million contract that is set to keep Montour in the Seattle Kraken lineup until 2031. With the assistance of his family – along with agent Matt Keator – Montour could focus on helping lead the Panthers to their first Stanley Cup title. Once the party subsided, however, things got real. "It was pretty hectic after the (playoffs) with talking to teams and talking to players and figuring out what to do," Montour said. "I was celebrating but also trying to figure out what was best for us as a family and myself as a player."

The answer to that question rested in the Pacific Northwest, where the Kraken continue to build what they hope is a winner and a culture that will accelerate that plan. "I think it was evident in selecting players like Yanni Gourde and Jaden Schwartz in Year 1," said Kraken assistant GM Jason Botterill. "We're looking for players that have that winning pedigree. Brandon has those back-to-back trips to the final plus his Stanley Cup win last season, which certainly was a big part of it for us."

With each passing year, Montour has honed several facets of his game. Most recently, it was a jump in his already solid offensive acumen. He turned heads when he nearly doubled his previous career best with a 73-point campaign in 2022-23. Despite losing an early chunk of last season while recovering

HEADS-UP PLAY
Montour's mobility and offense are obvious upsides, while the Kraken were also drawn to his on-ice smarts.



from shoulder surgery, Montour still posted 33 points in 66 games for the eventual champs.

Botterill, who first got to know Montour while he was GM of the Buffalo Sabres, has admired the blueliner's progression since those days. "He's an amazing skater, but his biggest development has come from where to pick his spots," Botterill said. "He's also used that skating ability to become a better defensive defenseman. As much as people talk about the points, he really prides himself on being able to match up against opposing teams' top lines. And he can play in all situations. He also wants to be a part of the leadership process here, and he'll get that opportunity with us."

That degree of responsibility – not to mention the long-term nature of the deal – appealed greatly to Montour. "We're super excited to start fresh with an organization like Seattle," he said. "I've showcased myself enough to be a part of a team (for a longer period of time). After talking to (Kraken GM) Ron (Francis) and specific players that reached out to me, we felt we found a place we could call home."

> THEY WANT TO WIN, AND I'M EXCITED **TO BRING THEM TO THAT NEXT LEVEL** – Brandon Montour

The Kraken won a playoff round in 2023, but they missed the dance last year. They'll attempt to rejoin the mix with a roster featuring equal parts youth and experience, which will make the most of Montour's Swiss-Army-knife style of play. "The numbers don't lie," Botterill said. "Last year, our 5-on-5 scoring took a dip. We feel some of our younger forwards will help us from an offensive standpoint, but we wanted to add more of an offensive element to help out Vince Dunn on the back end. We'll have (second-year blueliner) Ryker Evans going forward, but having someone like Brandon right away, who can be a good defensive defenseman but also initiate offense, was certainly very attractive for us."

Entering the dressing room with Montour, who is known for lighting up any room he walks into, is new coach Dan Bylsma. After a successful run with Seattle's AHL affiliate, the Coachella Valley Firebirds, the Stanley Cup-winning coach will bring a style that his ring-bearing rearguard will appreciate. "Dan brings personality and excitement to the rink," Botterill said. "Having a defenseman in the rush and trading some defense for offense is typically a part of Dan's system. What both Dan and Brandon bring makes this a really good fit both on and off the ice. It will help provide Brandon with a significant role for years to come."

All of this is music to the ears of Montour, who heads to Seattle with his wife, Ryian, a one-year-old son, Kai, and two dogs. And with a daughter on the way later this year, finding the right spot for everyone was critical. "After talking to the ownership and management group and knowing what the organization is aiming for and what they want me to bring, it really excites me," Montour said. "Our family already sees how the organization is run, not just for myself but for them as well. My wife is over the moon to be closer to (family), too."

It's a dead heat between player and manager in terms of who sounds more excited. But Montour may have summed up every dimension of this deal best: "They want to win, and I'm excited to bring them to that next level."

TOP: DAN HAMILTON-USA TODAY SPORTS; MIDDLE: SAM NAVARRO-USA TODAY SPORTS

CAROLINA HURRICANES

BANKING ON THE BRAIN GAME

The Hurricanes' new GM may come from an unconventional background, but perhaps that's precisely what the team needs to get over the hump **BY KEN CAMPBELL**

SIX YEARS AGO, A member of the Carolina Hurricanes' media-relations department was fined four dozen Bojangles biscuits – apparently the arteries of those working in the front office were just a little *too* clear – for being caught on camera dabbing with Sebastian Aho after a game. They did a whole department of player safety parody video to go with it, and it was hilarious. Considering these were the same Bunch of Jerks™ who brought us the Storm Surge, it was completely on brand.

There was a caveat to the fine in that the behavior "may be allowed given Aho's point production." After all, the incident came after the fourth game of 2018-19, in which Aho had a goal and an assist. Considering Aho started the season with a 12-game point streak – scoring four goals and 17 points – perhaps the indiscretion could be overlooked. Hey, as long the guy's producing…

But then they had to let the numbers nerd ruin the whole thing. During a Reddit AMA, Eric Tulsky – the Canes' VP of hockey management and strategy at the time – was asked about allowing the dabbing to continue. He responded with, "This is something the eye test gets flat-out wrong. Honestly, I think Aho would probably average 130 to 150 points a year if he didn't have to spend the whole game worrying about the post-game calamity," before adding that the employee, "probably also owes Aho tens of millions of dollars from the way holding him back will impact his career earnings."

See, these analytics guys do have a sense of humor after all. So maybe the Hurricanes' new GM, who has been with the organization for the past decade, won't die of seriousness. Because let's face it, Tulsky is a candidate. As with any guy with an undergraduate degree from Harvard and a PhD from Berkeley, both in chemistry – who devoted much of his pre-hockey career to building a more efficient electric-vehicle battery and making nanoparticles that emit light to be used for biological imaging (man, the guy was trying to design particles that would allow a surgeon to mark the edges of a tumor so they could cut out the tumor and leave the healthy tissue intact) – you're not exactly expecting a barrel of monkeys.

And you're not expecting a whole lot to do with the upper reaches of hockey management. But that's exactly where the 49-year-old Tulsky finds himself, right in the big-boy chairs in the first row of the NHL's GMs meetings. After one of the most unlikely front-office

RARE BREED

Tulsky is one of only a handful of current NHL GMs who didn't play high-level hockey.

PHOTO BY CAROLINA HURRICANES

careers ever, Tulsky takes over a Hurricanes team that seems to be at a crossroads. They've been good – really good. But not quite good enough, and it was a difficult summer for the franchise.

Tulsky finds himself in the GM chair because Don Waddell left rather abruptly to take over the Columbus Blue Jackets. And the Hurricanes took a few hits, particularly on the blueline, where both Brett Pesce and Brady Skjei left as free agents.

The game-breaker they had sought since forever arrived in the form of Jake Guentzel at the trade deadline, but he turned out to be a rental when he signed in Tampa Bay. There was the whole Martin Necas trade-request mess, which resulted in a tenuous two-year deal. The late-August signing of Seth Jarvis to a cutting-edge eight-year contract eased some nerves among the fan base. "It was really hard to see some of those players go," Tulsky said. "Ultimately, if you take our playoff roster and try to match the contracts for everybody who signed, whether it was with us or somewhere else, you end up with a payroll that is going to be somewhere around $108 million to $110 million.

"We had to make some hard choices. You can say, 'Well, let's replace this $3-million player with a minimum salary, and we're down to $106 million. And this $4-million player with a minimum salary, and we're down to $103 million.' You do that five or six times, and you're cap-compliant, but you've just gotten worse. We decided we didn't want to do that."

You don't need a PhD to realize that, but there's little doubt the Hurricanes are doing things a little differently under Tom Dundon, who is, let's say, a little more active than most owners. They doubled down on their embracing of the cutting edge when they hired analytics pioneer Tyler Dellow as assistant GM and promoted Darren Yorke to associate GM. That's not a lot of on-ice experience in the front office, which is important only if you consider how the ability to bleed on an NHL sweater transfers to managing. (Spoiler: it doesn't.)

Consider that Jay Feaster never learned to skate and built a Stanley Cup champion in Tampa Bay. Tulsky, who grew up a Philadelphia Flyers fan, at least played intramural hockey at Harvard. But he and his ilk are still in the minority. Of the 32 GMs in the NHL today, 15 played at least one NHL game, while an additional 10 played in the minors, junior or college. Only seven of them have no elite playing background, but that also includes Doug Armstrong, whose father was an NHL linesman and a scout, and Stan Bowman, whose father did a little coaching. In reality, only Tulsky, Kyle Davidson (Chicago), Chris MacFarland (Colorado), Kyle Dubas (Pittsburgh) and Julien BriseBois (Tampa Bay) rose from non-playing hockey backgrounds.

The referendum-on-analytics aspect of Tulsky's hiring is a little overblown because (a) others have already blazed that trail, and (b) Dundon doesn't really give a hoot what conventional hockey thinkers believe. And even though Tulsky is new to the head role, he has been around the game a while. And we know he's intelligent enough to put his adjacent experience and what he's learned in the world's best league to good use. "I don't think (Dundon) thought for one second about whether other teams had ever come from a data background or what that might mean for me," Tulsky said. "His focus would've been on what he thinks I'm capable of and whether he thinks I can help." H

IN THE EYE OF THE STORM
Tulsky takes over as GM for a team that's underperformed. His signing of Jarvis capped an active summer.

JARVIS: JOHN E. SOKOLOWSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS; TULSKY: PHOTO BY CAROLINA HURRICANES

UNDER THE RADAR

Foegele ranked among the league's top 50 forwards in even-strength scoring per 60 minutes.

LOS ANGELES KINGS

FROM FIERCE 'FOE' TO FRIEND

Three playoff matchups gave L.A. plenty of insight into what Warren Foegele could do in the right role **BY JARED CLINTON**

SAVE THE PAY, PROMINENCE and athletic ability, a major difference between big-leaguers and us regular folk is that, for us, changing employers doesn't necessarily mean walking into enemy territory. Alas, in the rough-and-tumble world of the NHL, it's not uncommon that enemies become friends overnight. Such is the case for Warren Foegele.

Over the past three seasons as a member of the Edmonton Oilers, Foegele has had a hand in breaking the collective hearts of the Los Angeles Kings, meeting and defeating the club in three consecutive first-round playoff affairs. When the 28-year-old hit the open market as an unrestricted free agent this summer, though, the Kings were among the first clubs to come calling, and with a three-year, $10.5-million offer, Foegele couldn't refuse.

And wouldn't you know it? Somehow, swapping uniforms not only saw Foegele have a change of heart about those once-despised Kings but smoothed over any long-held hostilities with newfound coworkers. "When I went down to L.A., I saw a couple of the guys there, and we've played them three years in a row in the playoffs," Foegele said. "Obviously, we don't really like each other, so it's kind of funny to now show up and we're teammates. It was funny to shoot the breeze with them, and they were awesome, super nice and welcomed me with open arms."

It surely helps matters that Los Angeles has first-hand experience playing against the proven commodity they've now brought aboard – and that Foegele is one whose career appears to be on the upswing.

A picture of consistency since arriving as a full-timer with the Carolina Hurricanes in 2018, Foegele had averaged nearly 14 goals and 28 points per 82 games throughout his first five NHL seasons before finding another gear last year. Though not Art Ross Trophy-contending totals, his 20 goals and 41 points marked a pair of career highs and gave a glimpse into the potential the versatile winger still possesses.

What paints perhaps the most promising picture is how Foegele has performed despite being given limited minutes. Last season, he was one of only three NHL players to score at least 20 goals while averaging less than 14 minutes per game, and scoring efficiency had been among his calling cards during his time in Edmonton. Throughout his three seasons as an Oiler, only the star producers – Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Zach Hyman and Evan Bouchard – accumulated more minutes while maintaining a scoring rate higher than Foegele's 1.88 points per 60 minutes.

That he was mostly limited to middle-six duty in Edmonton wasn't necessarily a sticking point for Foegele, who calls himself a low-maintenance player happy to do anything asked of him, but he won't deny he had eyes for a move up the depth chart. "It was definitely part of my decision-making going into free agency to get the opportunity to get a few more minutes," he said. "Obviously, playing in Edmonton, they're loaded with the best players in the world, and the way I've taken a lot of steps in my career, I have a lot more room to grow."

Where he's shown that growth already is at even

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strength, and his confidence in his own ability shines through when talking about his five-a-side efforts. Indeed, Foegele goes so far as to call himself "one of the better" 5-on-5 performers in the league. Last season's effort certainly didn't hurt his case, as Hyman and McDavid were the only Oilers with more five-a-side goals than Foegele. But the league-wide per-60 rates are most telling about his knack for delivering at even strength. Foegele's 2.19 points ranked 43rd in per-60 scoring at 5-on-5 last season among forwards to play 1,000-plus minutes, ahead of the likes of Tim Stutzle, Jason Robertson and Mark Scheifele.

In Los Angeles, however, Foegele sees a chance to be more than just a five-a-side threat. Of course, he's excited to bring his shorthanded prowess to Hollywood, as he was a fixture on the Oilers' brilliant post-season PK. But often blocked from top power-play minutes by Edmonton's cavalcade of stars, Foegele also envisions a larger role with the extra man in L.A. "I've had a lot of success playing in front of the net and being in that bumper spot," he said, "so (I'm) looking forward to that opportunity."

If all goes well, Foegele won't simply be part of the cast but will be above the title as part of a deep and balanced Kings team he believes is ready to stake its claim as a serious contender. But he knows taking that next step might ultimately mean another playoff meeting between Los Angeles and Edmonton.

So, having been on the other side of this recent post-season rivalry for the past three seasons, how does Foegele feel about possibly playing a hand in flipping the script against his old pals? "I'm a pretty competitive guy," Foegele said. "Once that puck drops, friends? They stay to the side." H

WARREN FOEGELE

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> I'M A PRETTY COMPETITIVE GUY. ONCE THAT PUCK DROPS, **FRIENDS STAY TO THE SIDE** – Warren Foegele

PACIFIC DIVISION

MEET THE NEW GUY

BY BRIAN COSTELLO

ROBBY FABBRI The writing was on the wall for Fabbri in Detroit last season. Despite tying his career high with 18 goals, he was near a career low in ice time. At 12:52 per game, he was well below the 16:42 he averaged over the previous four seasons and ranked 10th among Red Wings forwards. That's effectively fourth-line deployment. Detroit traded Fabbri and a fourth-round pick to Anaheim in July. Fabbri, 28, will be a middle-six winger who can step in and take faceoffs and provide a veteran presence in the dressing room.

ANTHONY MANTHA The Vegas Golden Knights picked up Mantha at the trade deadline in March to bolster their secondary scoring. The sniping winger was slow to adjust and wound up a healthy scratch for four of seven playoff games. That's not how it was supposed to go. Mantha, 30, is betting on himself by signing a one-year, $3.5-million contract to likely play in the top six for a rebuilding Flames team. With a strong season, Mantha will again surely be trade bait for a contender looking for a playoff boost.

JEFF SKINNER Since the start of 2021-22, only 42 NHL players have scored more than the 92 goals Skinner scored for Buffalo. But that didn't prevent the Sabres from buying out the remaining three years on Skinner's contract. All that baggage aside, Skinner was one of the most productive free agents available on July 1. The Oilers were happy to oblige, offering a one-year deal worth $3 million. He's bound to see a ton of playing time alongside Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, plus second-unit power-play time.

TANNER JEANNOT The Kings added much-needed grit to their lineup when they obtained Jeannot from Tampa Bay for second- and fourth-round draft picks. Jeannot struggled last year with the Lightning, who gave up a prospect and five draft picks to get him from Nashville in February 2023. At his best, Jeannot can antagonize opponents with strong board play while also chipping in offensively. He was seventh in Calder Trophy voting in 2021-22, scoring 24 goals and racking up 130 penalty minutes for the Predators.

JAKE WALMAN One of the strangest moves of the summer was San Jose's deal to acquire Walman. The 28-year-old defenseman had a breakthrough 2022-23 season in Detroit, and the Wings signed him to a three-year, $10.2-million extension in February 2023. Walman ramped up his output to 12 goals last season, and his playing time increased to 19:46. Then, in June, the Wings traded him – and a second-round pick as a sweetener – to the Sharks for future considerations, effectively just making him go away.

CHANDLER STEPHENSON has been one of the NHL's biggest bargains the past four seasons. Originally cast as a fourth-liner in Washington, Stephenson blossomed offensively in Vegas, and his $2.75-million AAV since 2020-21 was a great underpay. In 286 games during that span, he had 215 points, tying him for 72nd among NHL forwards. That translates to first-line production. But now, at age 30 in Seattle, he's really getting paid. Stephenson signed a seven-year UFA pact with an AAV of $6.25 million.

DANIEL SPRONG is like a modern-day version of the 1950s TV Western series *Have Gun – Will Travel*. Except Sprong shoots with his stick, and he's remarkably accurate by NHL standards. The 27-year-old right winger averages 20 goals per 82 games, and his career 11.8 shooting percentage is well above the league average. Yet Sprong has been on the go since the beginning. The Canucks are his sixth team in seven seasons after he signed as a UFA for $975,000. Another 20-goal pace at that AAV would be a bargain.

ALEXANDER HOLTZ Are the Golden Knights turning over a new leaf? Typically, they're the team trading away young prospects and draft picks in order to strengthen an already deep roster. But this summer, they picked up Holtz, the No. 7 overall pick in 2020, and prospect goalie Akira Schmid from New Jersey, while also acquiring two third-round draft picks from Washington for goalie Logan Thompson. Holtz is the key addition. Vegas thinks he can blossom into an NHL star in a new environment.

TEUVO TIME 2.0
Teravainen was dealt to Carolina as a promising young player in 2016. Now, he's back in Chicago as a proven vet.

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

BLOWN BACK TO THE WINDY CITY

Part of a regrettable trade eight years ago, Teuvo Teravainen returns for his second stint with Chicago **BY MATT CARLSON**

NO ONE WAS SURPRISED when Chicago Blackhawks GM Kyle Davidson signed Teuvo Teravainen to a three-year, $16.2-million contract as part of a free-agent flurry on July 1.

The logical deal brought the fleet Finnish winger back to Chicago after eight years in Carolina and gives the Blackhawks another legitimate top-six forward who figures to fit nicely on a line with reigning Calder Trophy winner and face of the franchise Connor Bedard.

And Davidson couldn't help but quip that it wasn't the first time he had "picked up" Teravainen, who turned 30 on Sept. 11 and is entering his 12th NHL season. Teravainen was drafted 18th overall by the Blackhawks in 2012 and spent his first three NHL seasons in Chicago. That included an encouraging playoff showing in 2015 as a 20-year-old when the team marched to its third Stanley Cup in six years.

Teravainen first arrived in Chicago for three games in March 2014. Davidson, then a Blackhawks hockey-operations assistant, was dispatched to O'Hare International Airport to fetch the young forward, drive him around Chicago and help him settle in. "I don't know if he even remembers me or knows that guy who picked him up is the same person that signed him now," Davidson said. "Whether he knows it or not, we've got a little more history there than he may understand.

"It's funny to see that kind of come full circle to where I'm signing him to a new contract and bringing him in as a veteran player when I picked him up at the airport as the youngest player on the team."

> I KNOW THE CITY. I HAVE GOOD MEMORIES FROM THERE, **SO IT WAS AN EASY DECISION**
> – Teuvo Teravainen

Teravainen, in fact, recalled the welcome and help from Davidson, who is the NHL's youngest GM at 36. "I do remember that," Teravainen said. "It's a funny story now when he's the GM and not the driver anymore. He talked with my agent, and I was so excited right away when I heard this chance to come back. I had a few options, but I felt this was the right path for me. I know the city. I have good memories from there, so it was an easy decision."

Former Blackhawks GM Stan Bowman traded an up-and-coming Teravainen to the Hurricanes in June 2016 in a deal made necessary by a salary-cap crunch. Teravainen blossomed into a solid producer in Carolina, putting up 138 goals and 415 points in 555 games. He was a key contributor on some fast, talented Canes teams, mostly skating on the top line with fellow Finn Sebastian Aho.

Davidson wants the rebuilding Blackhawks to play with speed and to pressure opponents. He's added eight free agents, plus winger Ilya Mikheyev from Vancouver via trade, to create depth around Bedard and other youngsters.

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Teravainen and power forward Tyler Bertuzzi from Toronto are the biggest additions up front. Both will surely skate with Bedard at some point as coach Luke Richardson constantly juggles his line combinations. The thought of Teravainen zipping all over the ice, then setting up Bedard – with his deceptive shot – has captured the fancy of Blackhawks fans during the off-season. "The way Carolina plays, it's fast everywhere," Teravainen said. "Create pressure. Try to make the other team make mistakes. That's kind of the way I've been playing. Of course, I'll bring my game, speed and a little bit of passing and try to see the ice and find the open guys.

"I'm turning 30 right now, so I'm a little bit of an older and better player, so I feel I can bring a little bit of everything."

If it meshes, it will make amends for Bowman's 2016 deal. He traded Teravainen, then 21, to the Hurricanes along with winger Bryan Bickell in order to unload a year of Bickell's contract. In return, the Hawks received a 2016 second-round pick (Artur Kayumov, 50th overall) and a 2017 third-round pick (Evan Barratt, 90th overall). They didn't pan out.

Teravainen stuck for good in the NHL beginning in January 2015, when he was 20. He appeared in 18 of the Hawks' 23 playoff games, posting four goals and 10 points as Chicago defeated Tampa Bay for the Cup. Teravainen followed up with 13 goals and 35 points in 78 games with Chicago in 2015-16, then moved on to Carolina. There, he truly blossomed, surpassing the 60-point plateau on four occasions, including a career-high 76 points in 2018-19.

Now, he returns to Chicago hoping to soar alongside Bedard. "I haven't seen him play much live," Teravainen said. "But, of course, I've seen all the highlights. So he seems like a pretty good player. Young for sure, but hopefully, I can help him a little bit get better, and it would be be pretty cool to play with him." H

TEUVO **TERAVAINEN**

TERRENCE LEE-USA TODAY SPORTS

HOPEFULLY, I CAN HELP (BEDARD) A LITTLE BIT. **IT WOULD BE PRETTY COOL TO PLAY WITH HIM** – Teuvo Teravainen

CENTRAL DIVISION

MEET THE NEW GUY

BY JARED CLINTON

TYLER BERTUZZI'S Original Six tour continues. After checking off Toronto, Boston and Detroit, the 29-year-old signed in Chicago on the heels of the fourth 20-goal campaign of his career. Though not the type to generate offense out of thin air, he is a prime candidate to do the grunt work on a line alongside Connor Bedard, particularly given Bertuzzi's willingness to get his nose dirty. Whether he reaches his past 30-goal, 62-point highs is to be seen, but opportunities abound on a thin Blackhawks roster.

Once the centerpiece of the package that the Vegas Golden Knights sent to the Ottawa Senators to land Mark Stone, **ERIK BRANNSTROM** arrives in Colorado looking to jump-start his career. Once considered a top defense prospect, Brannstrom, 25, has yet to meet expectations, but his puck-moving ability, skating and offensive upside are great assets. He'll start on the third pairing, but his skill set could see him earn a more prominent spot, and the Avs' high-end talent could also help unlock his potential.

In 76 games between Arizona and Tampa Bay last year, **MATT DUMBA** had just four goals and 12 points – a far cry from his 14-goal, 50-point career bests. At 30, he now plays with a decidedly more defensive bent. Thus, the veteran blueliner rides into Dallas to play the part of physical shutdown defender. When you consider that Dumba is one of only 30 defensemen to rack up more than 400 hits and 300 blocked shots over the past three seasons, it paints a clear picture of what he'll bring to the Stars' back end.

The Wild stood relatively pat this summer, but their acquisition of **JAKUB LAUKO** on draft day makes for an intriguing addition. In 60 games with Boston last season, the 24-year-old was a wrecking ball, throwing 176 hits – or 17.9 per 60 minutes of ice time – the 10th-highest rate among those to play at least 41 games last season. There's offensive upside there, too, as proven by his past AHL production. If given the opportunity, he could seize the chance to play regular minutes in the middle of the Wild lineup.

Though the Predators' active off-season closed off any clear route to top-six minutes for **JOAKIM KEMELL**, it wouldn't be surprising to see the 2022 first-round pick land in the NHL for stretches this season. The 20-year-old posted 16 goals and 41 points in his first full AHL campaign, and the slick scorer settled in well as the season wore on. Nashville is going to want him to get big-league reps when he can as they continue his steady development, even if he's playing as a third-line replacement.

RYAN SUTER continues his grand tour of the Central Division. The former Predators, Wild and Stars blueliner isn't the nailed-on No. 1 he once was, and the physical gifts are starting to go as he inches closer to his 40th birthday, but you can't teach the veteran savvy that he possesses. Suter can slide fairly seamlessly into a third-pairing role in St. Louis, and his tutelage could pay dividends for young D-men such as Scott Perunovich and Matthew Kessel. That's valuable with the Blues now in a transitional phase.

Utah altered the entire composition of its blueline this summer, and GM Bill Armstrong made no bigger splash than acquiring **MIKHAIL SERGACHEV** from Tampa Bay. Though the 26-year-old is coming off an injury-riddled campaign, he immediately takes on Utah's No. 1 'D' role and will step into premier spots on the power play and penalty kill. One year removed from a career-best 10-goal, 64-point effort and signed for seven more seasons, Sergachev can be Utah's linchpin on the back end for years to come.

His .898 save percentage and 3.64 goals-against average were among the NHL's worst marks last season, but there's important context where **KAAPO KAHKONEN** is concerned. First, he played all but six of his 37 games behind a dreadful San Jose defense. Second, he saw more rubber than any goalie to play at least 30 games – 35.7 shots per 60 minutes. During his previous stint in Minnesota, Kahkonen, 28, proved he can be a serviceable backup. That's all the Jets need behind workhorse starter Connor Hellebuyck.

NOSE FOR THE NET
A four-time 20-goal scorer, Duclair sniped a career-high of 31 in 2021-22. He's hoping to return to that level.

> I'VE PROVEN IN THE PAST THAT, WHEN I'M PUT IN THE **RIGHT SITUATION WITH THE RIGHT PLAYERS, I CAN PRODUCE**
> – Anthony Duclair

NEW YORK ISLANDERS

THE LONG WAY TO LONG ISLAND

As he joins his ninth NHL team in 11 seasons, Anthony Duclair has something new – a chance to stick around **BY KEN CAMPBELL**

WHEN ANTHONY DUCLAIR hits the ice with the New York Islanders in October, he'll be playing for his ninth NHL team in 11 seasons. That doesn't make him a unicorn, but it would definitely put him in *Conde Nast's* bathing suit issue. In fact, since 2014-15, when he made his NHL debut with the New York Rangers, Duclair has worn eight different NHL uniforms, with a side order of QMJHL Quebec Remparts, AHL Tucson Roadrunners and Team Canada WJC.

That's a lot, even by hockey's nomadic standards. Only Dominic Moore, who could've couch-surfed with friends through much of his career, and Lee Stempniak played for as many teams as Duclair will have through the first 11 seasons of their NHL tenures. But more than a decade into his career, Duclair looks as though he'll finally get to see what this long-term lease other guys speak of is all about. When the Islanders came to him on the first day of free agency, offering a four-year, $14-million deal, Duclair couldn't grab his pen fast enough. The deal has a full no-trade clause through the first two seasons and a modified one in the final two.

That'll certainly even out his HockeyDB page. And it will give Duclair, a four-time 20-goal scorer with real offensive chops, a chance to settle in with one organization, comfortable in knowing he won't be moving at the trade deadline – unless he accepts a move. It will allow Duclair to actually be ingrained in a team's culture and give him a coach, in Patrick Roy, who had him in junior and believes in him. That's enormous for a guy who has finished three of his 10 NHL seasons on a different team than he started it on.

"I think I can get back to where I was prior to the season I got hurt," Duclair said, referring to his 31-goal campaign in 2021-22. "I think I've proven in the past that, when I'm put in the right situation with the right players, I can produce. Every time and whenever that has been the case, I've shown that. I thought I showed it last year after the trade to Tampa."

Roy, to whom Duclair refers as his "new-old coach," had a lot to do with the Islanders signing him to a long-term deal. And if Duclair can chip in a couple of 30-goal seasons for a team that has been one of the most chronically underscoring clubs of the past several campaigns – they've been among the bottom 10 in goals per game in each of the past six seasons – a four-year deal at $3.5 million per season will be a steal.

"(Roy) didn't have to sell too much," Duclair said. "A call from Patrick was all I needed. When I was 16, he brought me to Quebec, and my feelings about him haven't changed one bit. Twelve years later, getting another opportunity to learn with

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him at the highest level with a team that I think is right there is great. I think we can do some great things."

A trip to Morocco and Spain in the off-season with three of his cousins and close friend Bokondji Imama (who played last year with AHL Belleville) was a nice diversion. But a good part of Duclair's summer was spent on the Anthony Duclair Foundation, which is doing some pretty exciting work. Under the banner of his foundation, he and Imama put together two hockey camps. One was for 50 kids at the Florida Panthers' former practice rink in Coral Springs. The other was for 52 kids at the home of the AHL's Laval Rocket for kids from groups currently underrepresented in hockey. And this fall, a synthetic ice rink funded by the foundation will open at Boyd H. Anderson High School in Lauderdale Lakes, Fla., and serve a student body that is made up of 85 percent minority communities. The first sentence of his foundation's mission statement boldly says, "Hockey is not for everyone and it's time to change that narrative," which is in direct contrast to the NHL's campaign that suggests otherwise. "Until I stop hearing stories from parents and kids year in and year out," Duclair said, "that statement will stay up there. I hear all the time about kids being treated unfairly, and I'm just trying to do my part."

It's clear Duclair is trying to be a difference-maker both on and off the ice. And he'll certainly have the opportunity to do that with the Islanders. But before he could do that, there was the matter of having to shave off his beard and cut his hair, because Lou Lamoriello. "I shaved it two weeks after I signed," Duclair said. "It's not bad, because I've had short hair before, and I've only had these dreads for two years now. The beard was kind of a shock for me because I haven't shaved since I was 20 or 21. After a couple of days, I got used to it." H

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HE DIDN'T HAVE TO SELL TOO MUCH. **A CALL FROM PATRICK ROY WAS ALL I NEEDED** – Anthony Duclair

METRO DIVISION

MEET THE NEW GUY

BY RYAN KENNEDY

The Hurricanes took a couple of body blows on the blueline this summer with the departures of UFAs Brett Pesce and Brady Skjei. But GM Eric Tulsky dipped into the open market himself to nab **SEAN WALKER**, a right-shot puck-mover who was vaunted for his leadership and presence in the dressing room when he was a member of a young Philadelphia Flyers squad. Walker was dealt to Colorado at the trade deadline, where the steady defenseman got some valuable playoff experience with the Avalanche.

While the Blue Jackets have some promising young forwards, it's always good to have a veteran down the middle who can stabilize matters when necessary. In center **SEAN MONAHAN**, Columbus has a solution as Adam Fantilli, Kent Johnson and Cole Sillinger continue to grow. Monahan had battled injuries since his career-best 82-point campaign in 2018-19, but he was resurrected last season in Montreal and Winnipeg. He's a big body with lots of smarts who can dish and bury in equal amounts.

After a steady ascent under GM Tom Fitzgerald, the Devils fell from the sky last season. Injuries were a big factor, but so was goaltending, which was porous at best. **JACOB MARKSTROM** had been a rumored solution at the trade deadline, but Fitzgerald ended up getting his man in the summer in a trade that sent defenseman Kevin Bahl and a 2025 first-rounder to Calgary. When Markstrom is at the top of his game, he's a star – and that's what New Jersey needs to take its next step as a Stanley Cup contender.

While the Isles saw a couple of departures in the off-season, nearly the entire crew is back for 2024-25. That said, GM Lou Lamoriello added more skill up front in Anthony Duclair and undrafted free agent **MAXIM TSYPLAKOV**, formerly of Spartak Moscow. A 6-foot-2 goal-scorer coming off his best KHL season at 25, Tsyplakov wasn't signed for AHL Bridgeport, according to Lamoriello. New York sees the right winger as an NHLer, and with Tsyplakov's scoring touch, the most obvious fit would be in a top-six role.

It's Stanley Cup or bust for this edition of the Rangers. Last year, the Presidents' Trophy winners went bust in the conference final, and puck possession was an obvious culprit. It had been a problem all season, but with the trade for **REILLY SMITH** from Pittsburgh, GM Chris Drury netted a forward who tends to have the puck more often than his foes do. Smith won the Stanley Cup with Vegas in 2023 and has long been a playoff performer thanks to his cerebral two-way game.

The Flyers were one of the most pleasant surprises in the NHL last season, but the team is still in the early stages of a rebuild. As the young players find their footing in the NHL, they'll need some sage veteran advice, and few players can offer the breadth of experience of blueline addition **ERIK JOHNSON**, the No. 1 pick in the 2006 draft and a Stanley Cup champion with Colorado in 2022. While Johnson won't log big minutes, he'll bring size, physicality and wisdom to the dressing room.

With Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin still up top, the Penguins focused more on depth in the off-season, bringing in another seasoned center in **KEVIN HAYES**. Acquired from St. Louis as a cap dump this summer, Hayes is coming off one of his worst campaigns, so a change of scenery should be welcomed by the big pivot. He doesn't make the Penguins any younger or faster, but Hayes has all the motivation in the world to turn things around and prove he can still be a viable middle-six threat.

Washington's blueline was pretty much reliant on John Carlson – and John Carlson alone – for offense last season, with his 52 points being more than twice as many as second-place Rasmus Sandin (23). **JAKOB CHYCHRUN**, acquired from Ottawa via trade, will help alleviate that pressure. A big, physical, two-way D-man, Chychrun has topped 40 points in a season twice in his career. Between Chychrun, 26, and fellow new recruit Matt Roy, the Caps are a lot deeper on 'D.'

NO JACKET REQUIRED
After deciding to move on from Columbus, Laine is looking forward to making a difference in Montreal.

> I THINK I'VE LEARNED TO LEARN THINGS ABOUT MYSELF, **HOW TO HANDLE CERTAIN SITUATIONS**
> – Patrik Laine

MONTREAL CANADIENS

RESTED AND REVITALIZED

Patrik Laine balances the personal and professional following trade to Montreal: 'I'm at a really good place' **BY DILLON COLLINS**

FOR PATRIK LAINE, THE Finnish goal-scorer and No. 2 overall pick in the 2016 NHL draft, the old adage applies: a change is as good as a rest.

At 26, the Tampere native is set to join his third NHL team following a late-summer swap between Columbus and Montreal. Laine's time with the Blue Jackets was plagued by injury and off-ice challenges – he suited up for just 174 games across four seasons – with the former 40-goal scorer entering the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program in late January.

Now renewed in mind, body and spirit, Laine looked the part of a new man during his introduction to the Canadiens' media. "It's not a secret that it's been a little tough on and off the ice lately, but I think I've learned, how do I put this, to learn things about myself – how to handle certain situations," Laine said during a virtual scrum. "I feel like handling and navigating through tough times is what I've learned mostly about myself these past couple of years. I feel like I'm at a really, really good place."

For Montreal GM Kent Hughes, buying low on a highly touted, albeit pricey and injury-prone sniper comes with a risk-reward balance, though for a young and growing Habs organization, the positives should outweigh the negatives. "To me, this isn't a transaction that either he scores 40 or 50 or it's a bust," Hughes said. "Far from it. My relay to him was if you come here ready to contribute to this team, to do everything in your power to help us get to a place, and if that's the opportunity that you're looking for, then say no more. Whether you score 20 goals or 40 goals, your success here is not going to be defined strictly by goals. It's going to be defined by your ability to help contribute to this team and help us."

The breakdown in the relationship between Laine – who was traded by Winnipeg to the Blue Jackets in early 2021 in a deal for fellow 2016 first-rounder Pierre-Luc Dubois – and the Columbus brass was well documented. Clashes with the coaching staff, high-profile healthy scratches, decreased production and lengthy periods of inactivity resulted in a marriage destined for divorce, with GM Don Waddell sharing with NHL.com in the wake of the trade: "We want players that want to be Blue Jackets, and Patrik made it clear that he thought a change of scenery was best for him."

For his part, Laine was tight-lipped about the reasons surrounding his discontent in the Arch City. "I don't want to look back on it too much," Laine said, adding he'll miss the city and its fan base. "I just want to focus on what's ahead of me. But it just wasn't a great fit for me. Obviously, I feel like the team and

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myself needed to move on, and me as a person needed a fresh start somewhere else. I feel like I'm going to leave it at that.

"Now, I'm just more focused on what's ahead of me instead of what's in the rearview mirror. I'm still going to cherish my time in Columbus. Yeah, it wasn't always easy, but when you look back on it, I loved living in Columbus. The people are awesome. The fans are passionate. So there was definitely a lot of good times in Columbus."

or 20, as long as the team wins. That's all I'm about. I just want to win."

Content to navigate the pressure of donning the *bleu, blanc et rouge*, Laine says that for the first time in a long time, he's healthy and happy both on and off the ice. "I think, most importantly, it's been just about Patty as a person more than Patty the hockey player," he said of his recovery and time away from the game. "One thing I've noticed is that when you're not enjoying

PATRIK **LAINE**

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THIS ISN'T A TRANSACTION THAT EITHER HE SCORES 40 OR 50 OR IT'S A BUST. **FAR FROM IT** – Montreal GM Kent Hughes

Now, thrust into a rabid Original Six market, Laine receives another chance to live up to the lofty expectations bestowed upon a shooter of his quality.

"I don't want to come back as a 30-goal scorer; I want to come back as a 40-50 (goal-scorer)," he said. "I've done that previously, and it's not by accident. But it's not just all about that. I want to come in and do whatever it takes to contribute to the team and make the team win, whether it's me scoring 50 whatever you do, you're probably not going to be able to perform. And that's kind of where I've been at. I haven't been enjoying myself for a while, but now, I'm happier than ever off the ice. I've done a lot of work on myself to get me back to this point where I'm actually super excited about playing in a new place with new teammates and a new city. I've learned a lot of things these last couple of years, and now, it's a really good time to put them to the test." H

ATLANTIC DIVISION

MEET THE NEW GUY

BY JARED CLINTON

There will never be another 'Big Z' in Boston, but with his towering frame, physical play and brash personality, **NIKITA ZADOROV** will very quickly ingratiate himself to Bruins fans. Beyond bringing snarl to the blueline, the 29-year-old rearguard solidifies an already sound defense corps in Boston, and he won't be asked to play outside himself. The Bruins simply want him to bring his punishing style to a middle-pairing role on the back end. That he can add a dash of scoring is an added bonus.

JASON ZUCKER is no longer the perennial 20-goal scorer he once was, but he has enough left in the tank to contribute as a second- or third-liner and chip in on the power play. The 32-year-old was nearly a half-point-per-game player in Arizona last season before being snapped up as a playoff reinforcement by Nashville. Zucker can serve as a veteran mentor to the Sabres' younger forwards, and his versatility will be valuable as Buffalo seeks to end the NHL's longest-ever post-season drought – 13 years and counting.

Detroit boasted a top-10 offense and a top-10 power play last year, and **VLADIMIR TARASENKO**, signed as a UFA on July 3, should further boost the Wings' offensive returns. Yes, it's been several years since he was at the height of his powers, but it should be noted that his 55 goals at five-a-side over the past three seasons tie him for 33rd in the NHL in that span. His reputation may be that of a pure shooter, but the 32-year-old has more to offer and stands to thrive as a support player behind Detroit's top stars.

Another year, another Panthers reclamation project. This time, it's **NATE SCHMIDT**. Bought out by Winnipeg in June with one year left on his pact, Schmidt, 33, is looking to prove he can be an asset to the defending Stanley Cup champions. And the departures of Brandon Montour and Oliver Ekman-Larsson create an obvious void for Schmidt to fill. He was a regular top-four defender in Winnipeg two seasons ago, and he can readily act as a power-play quarterback and take on penalty-killing minutes, too.

Considered another potential late-bloomer in Tampa Bay – in the same vein as Jonathan Marchessault – **ALEX BARRE-BOULET** couldn't quite make a seamless leap from AHL all-star to NHL regular with the Bolts. But the Habs hope his past minor-league scoring prowess can translate to regular NHL production. Barre-Boulet, 27, must battle through the logjam of veterans in Montreal's bottom six, but given he inked a one-way deal this summer, it's likely Montreal will give him the chance to prove he can make an impact.

DAVID PERRON has been the picture of consistency throughout his 17-year NHL career, so the Sens know what to expect from the 36-year-old left winger: production in the neighborhood of 20 goals and 45 points to go along with fiery competitiveness. Now in the twilight of his career, and given the young talent up front in Ottawa, Perron is slated for a third-line role, but he'll feature on the power play, too. His 39 power-play points ranked second among Red Wings players during his two seasons in Detroit.

Ryan McDonagh is back in Tampa Bay, but it could be **J.J. MOSER** who does the most to reshape the Lightning blueline after a summer of great upheaval. Acquired in the swap that sent Mikhail Sergachev to Utah, the 24-year-old Moser is fresh off three quietly impressive seasons in Arizona. While he's versatile and has the instincts to run a power play, his own-zone play will be his calling card. Don't be surprised if he relieves some of the pressure on Victor Hedman by playing on the top penalty-killing unit.

The beauty of **CHRIS TANEV'S** game is in its simplicity. He thrives by frustrating foes with a well-placed stick, a bit of physical play or by using his body to close shooting lanes. Over the past five seasons, only three players have blocked more shots than Tanev, and his willingness to do the dirty work can have a transformative effect on teammates. And it's a myth that he's injury-prone. During three-plus seasons from 2019 to 2022, he played 215 consecutive games. He's an ideal fit alongside a freewheeling rearguard.

Watts led Ottawa with 10 goals last season. This year, she's bringing her scoring skill to Toronto.

PWHL TORONTO

BACK IN BLUE

Daryl Watts made a splash in PWHL free agency by signing with her hometown Toronto team after starring for rival Ottawa in Year 1

BY CAROL SCHRAM

IN 2018, JOHN TAVARES dominated the NHL's free-agent discourse when he chose to sign with his hometown Toronto Maple Leafs. Six years later, Daryl Watts did the same in the PWHL.

Watts, 25, is a Toronto native who grew up loving the Leafs just like Tavares did. "I was a huge Mats Sundin fan," she said. "I think I had his jersey when I was a kid."

Darcy Tucker was another favorite from that era, but kids are fickle. When those two players moved on in 2008 and Toronto's playoff drought continued, Watts' nine-year-old attention span shifted 230 miles southwest, where another Original Six squad was competing for Stanley Cups.

"I kind of switched to a Red Wings fan for a bit," she said. "So I loved (Pavel) Datsyuk, (Henrik) Zetterberg, (Nicklas) Lidstrom."

Phil Kessel eventually drew her back to Leafs Nation. But no matter where her loyalties lay, Watts had an early appreciation for high-end skill. That has translated into her own career; she's a smart and creative forward who can put up points.

When she started her NCAA career at Boston College in 2017, Watts became the first rookie to win the Patty Kazmaier Award after she led the nation with 42 goals and 82 points in 38 games. After two seasons, she transferred to the University of Wisconsin, where she won a national championship in 2021. And after a quiet start with PWHL Ottawa last season, she finished the year with 10 goals, which led the team in that figure. That was good enough to tie her with

Marie-Philip Poulin and Laura Stacey for fourth in the league's goal-scoring race.

Watts was arguably the biggest name on the market when PWHL free agency opened on June 21. After inking a two-year deal with her hometown team, she'll add even more firepower to the club that finished first in the regular-season standings, powered by offensive leaders Natalie Spooner and Sarah Nurse and anchored in net by Kristen Campbell – another former Badger, who was Watts' roommate at Wisconsin.

"Daryl had a great season with Ottawa," said Toronto GM Gina Kingsbury. "She's an incredible offensive threat that has proven herself in this league. We felt adding some offense to our roster was an important piece to the puzzle."

Watts' path to this point is surprising – and impressive – considering she announced her retirement from hockey at 22 after graduating with a degree in communications. "I just didn't really see myself continuing playing hockey, because of the uncer-

TOP: ANDREA CARDIN/PWHL; MIDDLE: ANDRE RINGUETTE/PWHL

tainty with the league and the uncertainty of, 'How much money can you make? Can you support yourself? Like, what is this going to look like?' " Watts said. "Obviously, the corporate world is stable. I was planning on going back to Wisconsin to get a master's degree, but then things changed."

Ten months after her retirement, Watts inked a two-year deal with the PHF's Toronto Six. As she was joining the team midway through the 2022-23 season, the key term of the contract was her salary for the second season. At $150,000, it was set to be the richest pro contract ever in women's hockey. But the deal went up in a puff of smoke with the June 2023 announcement that The Mark Walter Group and Billie Jean King Enterprises had acquired the PHF and would be starting their own league. The birth of the PWHL voided all existing PHF deals, including Watts' landmark pact.

Watts played 16 games with the Six in the spring of 2023, including suiting up for each of their four playoff games en route to capturing the last Isobel Cup championship.

But Watts' retirement period had impacted her conditioning. She'd been off the ice for months when she joined the Six. "When I graduated school, I stopped lifting weights," she said. "I would do light cardio, long walks and stuff like that. I'd lost all of my hockey muscle."

In February 2023, her longtime skills coach, Dusan Kralik, arranged an introduction to renowned trainer Gary Roberts, the longtime NHLer who has built an impressive reputation in his post-playing days through his work with NHL stars such as Connor McDavid and Steven Stamkos. "(Kralik) was like, 'OK, Daryl, obviously, we have to do something drastic to try to get you back in hockey shape,' " Watts said. "So, then he connected me with Gary. He's totally changed my fitness. He's more than just a strength trainer. Kind of a mentor, I guess. Him and his team. Definitely grateful that I worked with them, and I still do."

This summer, she settled into an off-season routine at Roberts' training hub just north of Toronto. "Basically, it's Monday to Friday," Watts said. "Lifting, speed work, on-ice skills. And there's a scrimmage on Friday."

Watts also takes part in a weekly 3-on-3 scrimmage for Toronto-based PWHL players run by Ray LeBlanc of S.P.E.E.D. Hockey Development. "That's super fun," she said.

MIDDLE: MATT ZAMBONIN/PWHL; TOP: ANDREA CARDIN/PWHL

RETURN TO ACTION

Watts briefly retired after her NCAA career came to an end, but she was back on the ice less than a year later.

Also fun? She has now signed a lease on her first place in her hometown as she prepares for her third season as a pro player.

Her current occupation also requires participation in many off-ice events. The first one came on Aug. 5, when Watts debuted her new blue PWHL Toronto jersey as she and a group of teammates took on a team of Women's Tennis Association stars in a ball-hockey game at the National Bank Open.

"That was super cool," she said. "(Victoria) Azarenka was playing ball hockey with us, and (Jelena) Ostapenko. My mom's a huge tennis fan, so I got Azarenka's autograph for her."

Watts will be signing plenty of autographs of her own this season, as her team looks to parlay its first-year regular-season success into a league championship.

She got a title taste as part of the group that brought the Isobel Cup to Toronto, but she knows a PWHL title would have a bigger impact. "Winning a championship for Toronto at the time was incredible," she said. "I can't even imagine the celebration for winning a Walter Cup for PWHL Toronto. That would be so special."

Maybe Mats Sundin will come to the parade. H

PWHL OTTAWA

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

Gwyneth Philips knows a thing or two about waiting for her opportunity to arrive. And now, she's getting a chance with PWHL Ottawa **BY IAN KENNEDY**

ELITE GOALTENDING dominated the PWHL's inaugural season. Night after night, it was a duel between Olympic and World Championship all-stars. There was never an easy game for shooters, but for up-and-coming goalies, it also meant that to earn a spot, even as a second- or third-stringer, they needed to be world-class.

Enter Gwyneth Philips. At the 2024 PWHL draft, there were no guarantees a goaltender would be selected, particularly one who'd appeared in just 16 games over her first three NCAA seasons. It wasn't Philips' lack of talent or Northeastern University's lack of trust in her that limited her games, however. What held Philips' totals down was the fact the school's starter was Aerin Frankel, who won the NCAA's Goalie of the Year Award in 2021 and 2022 and is now the No. 1 for both PWHL Boston and Team USA.

When Philips took over Northeastern's crease following Frankel's graduation, she had something to prove. In her first season as Northeastern's starter, Philips posted a 0.87 goals-against average, .960 save percentage, 10 shutouts and a 34-3-1 record. For her efforts, she was named the NCAA's goaltender of the year in 2023. Last season, she followed up with another stellar campaign and was named a first-team all-American and, for the first time ever, earned a spot of her own on Team USA.

FROM BACKUP TO BREAKOUT
Philips sat on the bench for three years at Northeastern, then became the NCAA's top goalie in Year 4.

In the span of two seasons, Philips went from virtually unknown to the first goaltender selected in the 2024 PWHL draft, going 14th overall to Ottawa. Some thought the first netminder chosen would be Czechia's starter and former Olympic and World Championship all-star Klara Peslarova, but she went undrafted.

"It's a really competitive spot with there only being six teams and three goalies per team," Philips said. "Seeing the names that are backups or even third-stringers, it's incredible to be a part of it. You've got all three Canadian and U.S. national-team goalies. You've got Sandra Abstreiter, who's lights-out whenever she's in the worlds. But she hardly got any games last year, so that shows you how competitive and difficult it is."

In fact, it is Abstreiter's job that Philips stole, despite the German incumbent being named the best goaltender at the 2024 World Championship. Shortly after the draft, Philips signed a two-year contract with Ottawa. She'll start the season as the backup to Team Canada's Emerance Maschmeyer. It's a role she's accustomed to playing after being behind Frankel for years. She also knows the importance of claiming her moment when the opportunity arrives. Philips said she'll be Maschmeyer's support and friend but will also ensure "she feels some pressure and is always working hard." It's a challenge Philips is prepared for, knowing that most goalies in the PWHL

TOP: JIM PIERCE/NORTHEASTERN ATHLETICS; MIDDLE: ALYSSA STONE/NORTHEASTERN ATHLETICS

have never had to fight for a backup job.

"I'm sure most of those goalies haven't had an experience like me," she said. "Most of them were starters their whole college career, but, for me, having that understanding of what it takes to be a backup goalie, it's going to give me an edge. I know what it takes, mentally and physically, and how to be a good teammate. It's a hard position to be in, if you come into your pro career and you've never had to deal with that. But I know what to do, and I can bring that to Ottawa."

Like many young players, Philips tried out several positions when she was starting out in hockey. Following her brother into the sport, she began in a house-league program in Athens, Ohio. Her father didn't want her to be a goaltender, but it was the position she gravitated toward regardless. "When I was in house league, it was half-ice, and you'd switch every two minutes," she said. "There was a goalie glove, a blocker and a goal stick. I always wanted to be the goalie every time we switched. My dad hated that."

While her brother was playing at a tournament in Quebec, Philips and her mother snuck off to a used-equipment store and bought goalie pads. The rest is history. Piece by piece, they kept buying equipment, and they eventually convinced her dad to let her play goalie for her house-league team.

TOP: ARIANNE BERGERON/PWHL; BOTTOM: PHOTO BY IAN KENNEDY

Soon, at a pond-hockey game with a boys team she also played for, Philips volunteered to play goal. Her coach saw her potential and recommended she try the position full-time. From there, Philips' dad, now on board with the plan, took her wherever he could for ice time. That included a USA Hockey camp, where they snuck her in among players two years older.

U.S. VS. THEM

Philips suited up for Team USA at the 2024 worlds, marking the first time she'd ever represented her country.

It was there that Philips caught the attention of Kathy Pippy, founder of the Pittsburgh Penguins Elite girls' program.

"Kathy Pippy was there and saw me," Philips said. "She had no idea who I was. She was like, 'Wow, this kid has got no structure and no idea what she's doing out there, but she's good. She can stop the puck.' So, she found my dad and encouraged him to switch me from boys to girls hockey."

And they did. Philips joined the Penguins Elite, making the three-hour trip from her home in Athens and quickly established herself as an NCAA prospect. Pippy remembers seeing Philips at that camp. "The first time I saw a then-10-year-old Gwyneth play was at a USA Hockey regional camp tryout for 12- and 13-year-olds," Pippy said. "She was the tiniest nugget out there, but she was fearless and challenging the older players. I knew right away I had to find out who she was and get her involved with my program."

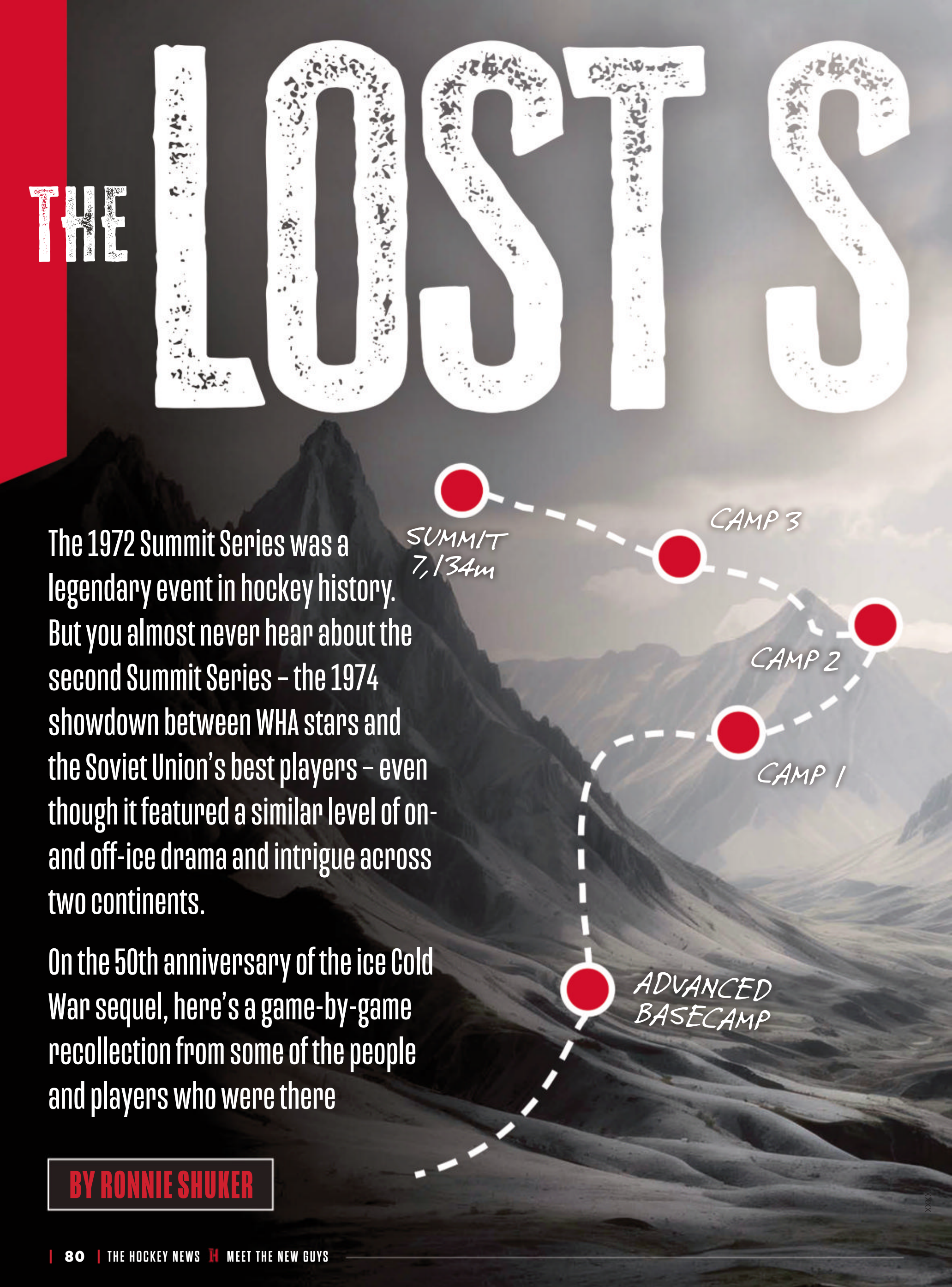
As it happened, more than a decade later, Pippy's eyes were still being drawn to Philips. In January 2024, Pippy was hired by PWHL Ottawa as a special advisor to their hockey-operations department. Part of that role was identifying potential talent for Ottawa ahead of the draft and free agency. So, it only made sense for Ottawa to select Philips, who Pippy describes as smart, quick, "uber-competitive" and who "never gives up on a puck." With Philips' hockey journey coming full circle, the only thing left is for her to step into the PWHL and prove herself yet again.

"It's fun," she said. "It's an exciting time. I want to see if I can prove it again. I played only a handful of games those first three years in the NCAA, so there was some doubt. Not a lot of people knew what I was capable of, and even I started to doubt. But with this new season and new staff in Ottawa, I'm excited to prove myself, even if I just get thrown in here and there. I'm excited to come in and prove what I can do." H

THE LOSTS

The 1972 Summit Series was a legendary event in hockey history. But you almost never hear about the second Summit Series – the 1974 showdown between WHA stars and the Soviet Union's best players – even though it featured a similar level of on- and off-ice drama and intrigue across two continents.

On the 50th anniversary of the ice Cold War sequel, here's a game-by-game recollection from some of the people and players who were there



BY RONNIE SHUKER

UMMIT

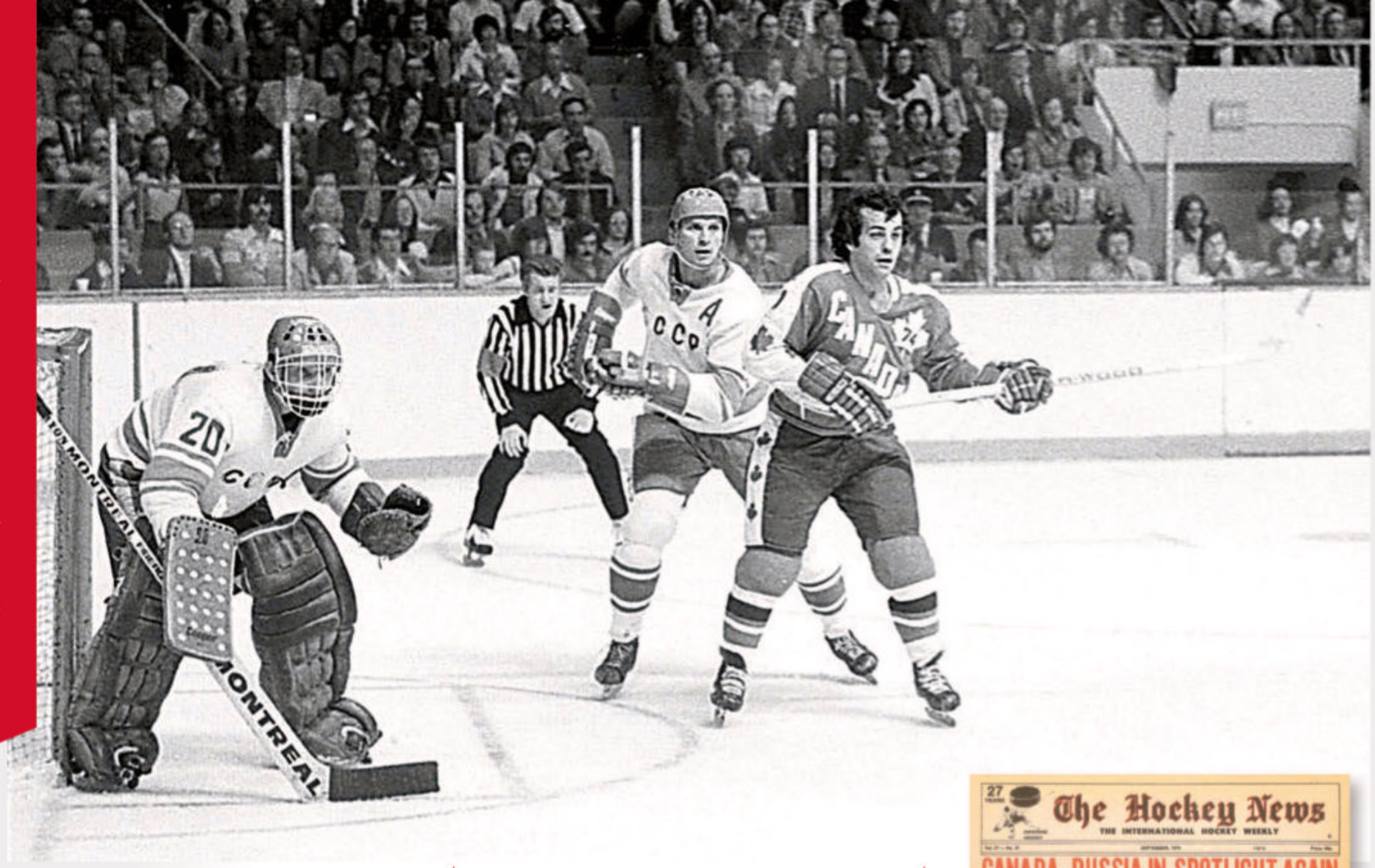
To honor 1974, sticks from Tretiak and Hull travelled to the summit of Lenin Peak.

ON JULY 21 AND 22, on a joint project of the Russian hockey and climbing federations, a group of professional climbers ascended Lenin Peak in the Pamir mountain range in what is now Kyrgyzstan. Among their gear were two special souvenirs. One was a signed white goalie stick from Vladislav Tretiak, the other a brown left-handed Bobby Hull stick, with its shanked curve just about pointing due east. When they reached the summit, at 23,406 feet, they brought out both sticks and set them in the snow, arranging Tretiak's stick against a miniature three-balled snowman. Video was shot, selfies were taken, tributes were said in Russian.

That is how Russia chose to remember the second Summit Series, by summiting the third-highest mountain in the former Soviet Union with the goalie stick of the country's most legendary player and the stick of one of the greatest Canadian goal-scorers he ever faced.

In Canada, meanwhile, the 1974 Summit Series remains but a footnote to the first. This should come as no surprise. Victory is easier to honor than defeat is to accept. Few will recall that, after a collection of overconfident NHL stars scripted their way to a Hollywood ending at the original series in 1972, a group of underappreciated stars from the WHA wrote a sequel two years later. Same opponent, same format, same arenas (except one), similar timeframe, same sequence, with some of the same players. Ultimately, only the ending, and the scale of recollection since, was different.

Hundreds of books abound about '72. All of three exist about '74, only one of which has been published in the past 49 years.



But as the 50th anniversary approaches, the 1974 Summit Series is well worth reliving, because the sequel featured all of the hallmarks of the original: sublime skill, intense competition, cheap shots, fights, questionable officiating, lineup debates, political posturing, diplomatic expectations, capitalist pretensions, communist bureaucracy, backroom bargaining, bugged hotel rooms, stolen beer and, of course, blood. Just like in ’72, the fate of ’74, too, would be measured in mere seconds.

Players, coaches, organizers and supporters who’ve passed can only speak from the newspaper accounts and in-game interviews from the series. But Canadian players Paul Henderson, Mark Howe, Andre Lacroix, Rejean Houle and Brad Selwood remember well “the forgotten summit,” as it has been called, while Tretiak, through an interpreter and a translator, savors it as the Soviets’ first victory over Canadian professionals.

CANADA

“WE’RE BEHIND BOTH TEAMS. WE’RE FOR PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP” – Canadian federal health and welfare minister Marc Lalonde

Having escaped with the series win in ’72, the NHL wanted no part of a rematch when the idea was floated to Hockey Canada just over a year later. Having declared war on the upstart WHA, the NHL unwittingly supplied the Soviets with their replacement when an agreement was signed in the spring of 1974.

RIVALRY RENEWED

In 1974, Canada had three players who took part in the ’72 Summit Series. The Soviets had 18 returnees.

A joint effort of Hockey Canada, the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association and the WHA (especially team owners ‘Wild’ Bill Hunter and Ben Hatskin), the second series was the perfect setup for the nascent league but also a mighty gamble: win and the WHA could stand shoulder to shoulder with the NHL; lose and it might never shake the “bush league” label with which the NHL had been branding it.

“The guys wanted to prove to the NHL players that we can beat those guys also, but we were dreaming, in a way,” Houle says. “In ’72, they had so many big stars, and they had a problem to win, too.”

Led by coach Billy Harris, Team Canada’s training camp lasted 16 days and featured five tune-up games against a junior all-star team from the Western Canada League. But this wasn’t Team Canada from two years prior. Only three players returned, all of whom had jumped ship from the NHL to the WHA: Pat Stapleton, Frank Mahovlich and Henderson. The team’s average age was 29.4, with 46-year-old Gordie Howe and his 19- and 20-year-old sons, Mark and Marty, pulling the mean at either end. All these years later, there are now 14 Hall of Famers from the first team in 1972 and only five from the second.

“It was obviously a lot stronger team in ’72,” Henderson says. “I’m not downgrading anybody in ’74. They were all great hockey players, or they wouldn’t have been there. It’s just like when a first-place team plays a fifth- or sixth-place team. Over a period of time, the better team and the better players are going to win. We knew we were in tough, that’s for sure, going in. But we wanted to prove ourselves also.”

27 YEARS
The Hockey News
THE INTERNATIONAL HOCKEY WEEKLY
CANADA-RUSSIA IN SPOTLIGHT AGAIN
NHL, WHA TRAINING CAMP ROSTERS AND SCHEDULE OF EXHIBITIONS
THEY'LL BE THE SAME OLD BRUINS
WHA INDIANAPOLIS RATES BROWN PRIZE CATCH
RANGERS TO SHOW BOTH NEW FACES AND CAPTAIN
HATSKIN SAYS HE'LL PAY FOR SWEDISH STARS
SHERO CONFIDENT FLYERS STILL HUNGRY FOR SUCCESS
THE BIG ONE
Big taste, big satisfaction

Team USSR returned 18 players from 1972, with assistant coach Boris Kulagin taking over behind the bench. The average age was 23.8, with only one player on the other side of 29, the age at which most Soviet players were retired.

Most pundits were picking Team USSR to win. Many were predicting a landslide, even among Canadian media.

“There’s no friggin’ way in 100 years we’re ever going to win this series,” Henderson says. “That’s what they were saying.”

For the record, The Hockey News polled a panel of 25 experts ahead of the series: 13 picked Team Canada, eight picked Team USSR, four figured on a draw.

JR SPORTS IMAGES/JOE RIZZUTO COLLECTION

SAVING GRACE

By the end of the '74 Summit Series, the Soviets were calling Cheevers the best goalie they had ever faced.

GAME 1

"WE WERE A LITTLE BIT SCARED OF THE '72 TEAM. BUT THIS TEAM KNOWS US BETTER, AND THEREFORE, IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO PLAY AGAINST THEM" – Valeri Kharlamov

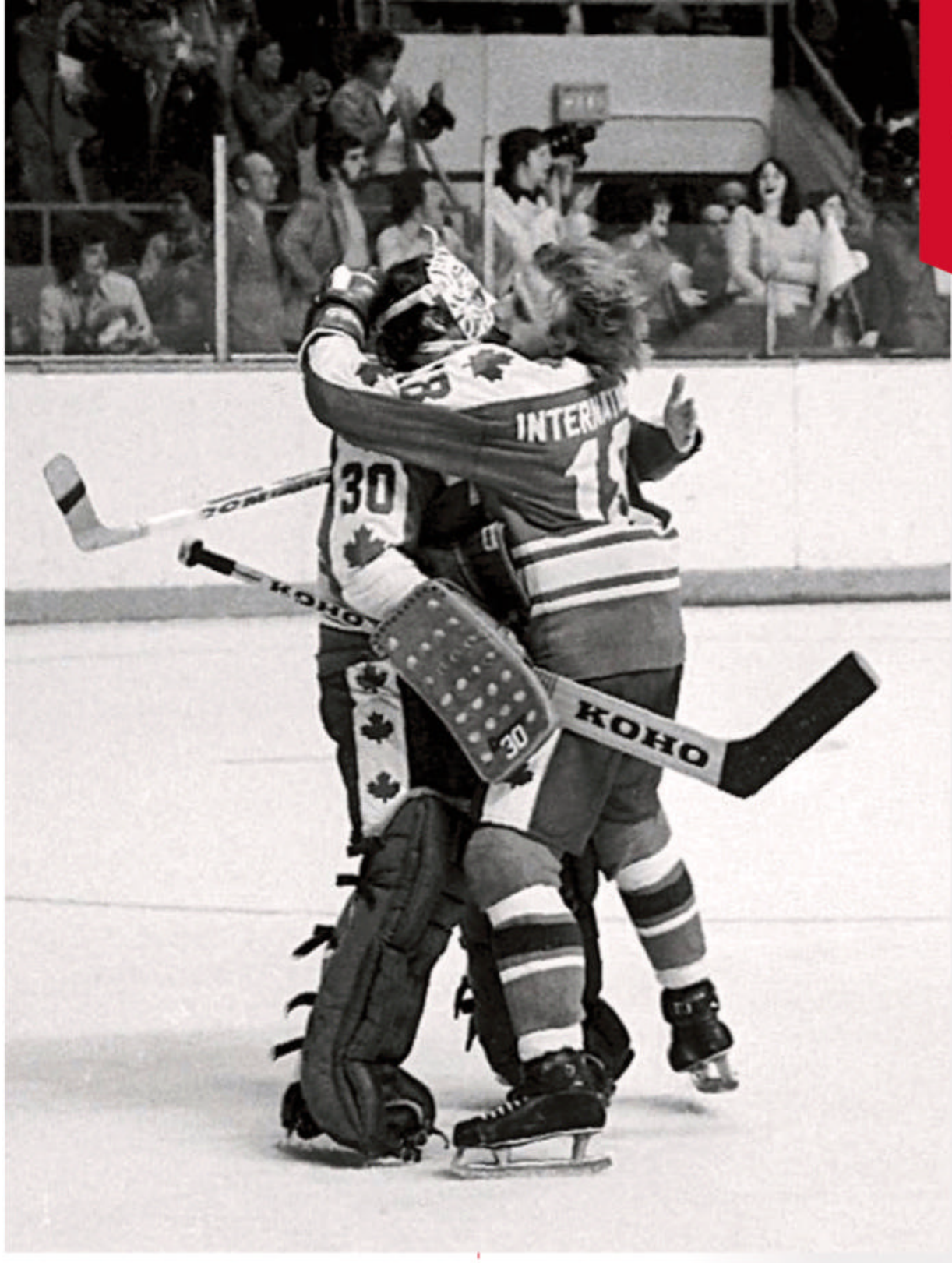
The ceremonial puck drop was just supposed to be a photo op when Stapleton and Boris Mikhailov lined up at center ice at La Colisee de Quebec in Quebec City. In attendance was Canadian prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who'd pushed hard for the series as part of his government's efforts to promote more trade with the Soviet Union. Sharing the puck was Georgi Regulsky, vice-chairman of the Soviet Sports Federation. With wide smiles, Trudeau and Regulsky leaned in between the two captains. Either the Soviets didn't get the memo, or they used the moment to send one to the Canadians. The mercurial Mikhailov, who'd nearly kicked off a brawl in Game 7 of the first series by kicking Gary Bergman, played it like a faceoff in a tie game, hacking at the puck and pulling it away from Stapleton with a clear backhand win into his own end. He then skated away, much to the shock of Trudeau.

"I think we were all taken aback by the way he did it, not necessarily *that* he did it," Selwood says. "We all went, 'What was that?' "

Mikhailov returned to shake hands with the prime minister, but the message had been sent. The Soviets were ready.

Unlike two years earlier, so were the Canadians, especially Gerry Cheevers, who, like Hull, had been left off the roster in '72 after leaving the NHL for more money in the WHA. After the series, the Soviets would call Cheevers the best goalie they'd ever faced.

The vaunted Team USSR offense had embarrassed an unconditioned and underprepared group of NHL stars 7-3 in Game 1 in '72. But two years later, with Cheevers in net for the WHA stars, the Soviets could muster only three goals in a 3-3 tie. Hull evened the score late in the third period, and Team Canada would've won had Mahovlich converted a mini breakaway with 36 seconds remaining. "We feel like we could beat those guys," Houle says. "I'm not saying that we're better than them, but if we play the right way and do the right thing, we'll be able to beat those guys."



JR SPORTS IMAGES/JOE RIZZUTO COLLECTION

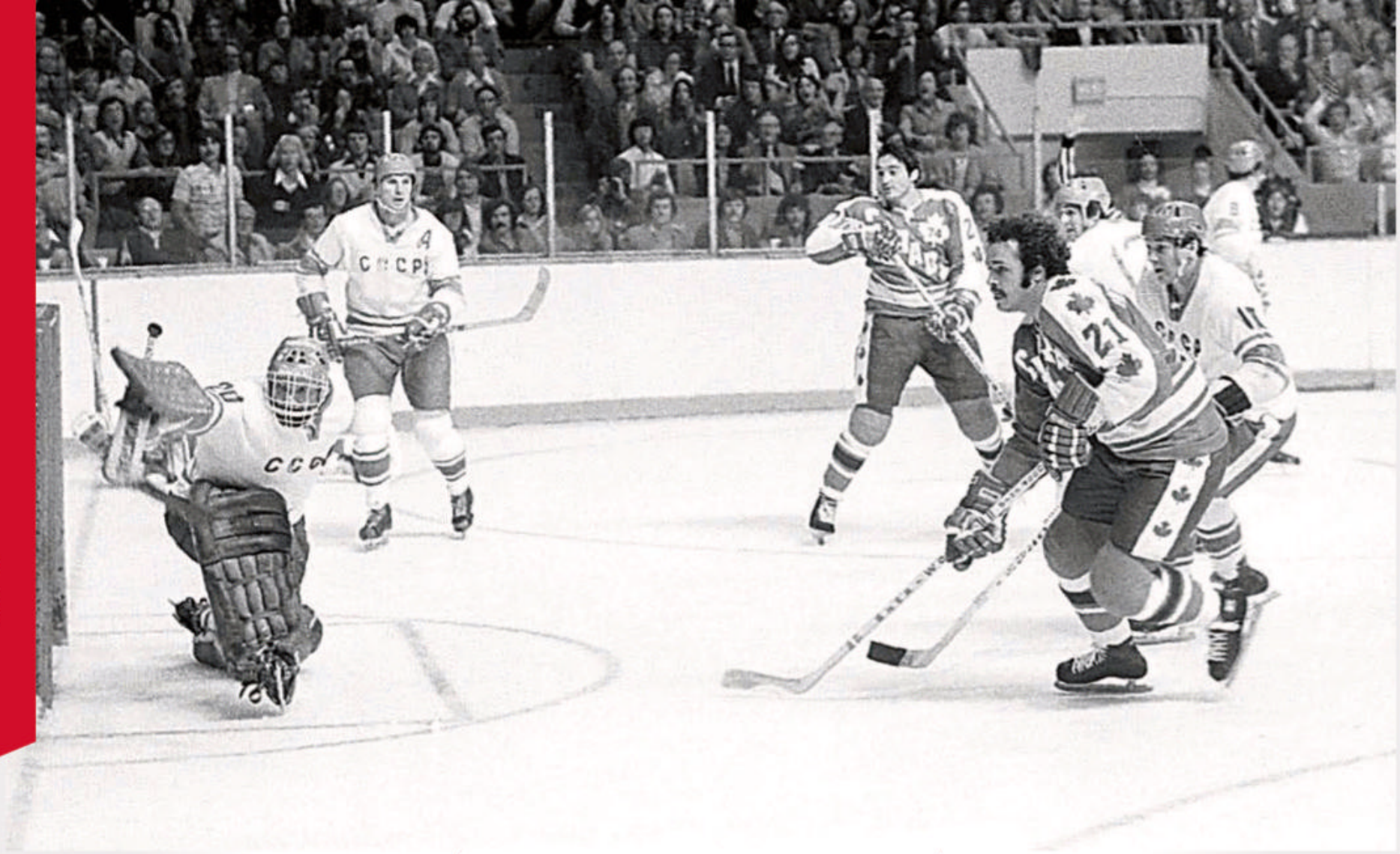
GAME 2

"THE PUCK WAS IN THE NET AND SHOULD'VE COUNTED. I WANT CANADA TO WIN, BUT I WANT THEM TO WIN FAIRLY" – Harold Ballard

Aside from Mikhailov's overenthusiastic pre-game faceoff, the series opener had gone as smoothly as Canadian diplomats had hoped. But off the ice, trouble was brewing. According to a research paper from the Fraser Institute, a Canadian think-tank, a Canadian citizen had gotten a court order to have the Soviets' equipment seized as compensation for his car being destroyed in the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. It took Hockey Canada and External Affairs to intercede to keep the series on track.

Then, soon after Game 1, the Soviets began calling into question Canadian hospitality. As part of their agreement, both teams were to take commercial flights between Canadian cities. So, when Team Canada took a charter to Toronto for Game 2, the Soviets threatened to pull out of the series. Admitting their blunder, Canadian organizers apologized, but the Soviets tabled other complaints. Instead of a direct flight to Toronto, they had to layover in Montreal. When they finally arrived at the Royal York hotel, they had to wait two hours for their rooms…which pushed back their practice… which reportedly took place on bad ice… which was the result of a broken resurfacing machine. The Soviet press did its part to play up the events, claiming the hotel delay lasted long into the night, depriving the players of a good night's sleep and leading to their poor showing in Game 2, as Team Canada duplicated its '72 win in Toronto, 4-1. "Toronto was generally an unlucky city for us," Tretiak says. "We always lost there. Why is unclear. For as long as I played, we always lost there. For some reason, Toronto was an unlucky city for us."

By then, controversy had made its first appearance on the ice. Down two goals early in the third period, Team USSR appeared to cut the deficit to one when a shot from Vladimir Petrov hit the back crossbar and bounced back out into play. The red light went on, and the Soviets' arms went up



just as Canadian referee Tom Brown waved off the goal. Mikhailov protested, even going over to point to the red light that the goal judge behind Cheevers kept flashing. Brown wouldn't relent. He hadn't seen the puck go in, he said. Replays clearly show otherwise.

"Everybody in the building – everybody! – knew that puck went in except the three officials on the ice," Mark Howe says. "There's no doubt that puck went in the net."

After the game, Kulagin offered his thoughts on the non-goal.

"I hope I don't see that referee again," said the Soviet coach.

But with a rotating group of four referees, he would, and he would be glad he did.

GAME 3

"WE GAMBLED, AND WE LOST. IF WE HAD BEATEN THEM TODAY, WE WOULD HAVE WON THE SERIES" – Billy Harris

With a win and a tie, no one would have been surprised had Harris stuck with the same lineup for Game 3 at the Winnipeg Arena. Instead, he made six changes. Among them was Gordie Howe, who was given the game off to heal the bruised ribs he had sustained in Game 2, and Cheevers, who stayed back in Toronto after his father-in-law had suffered a heart attack at Maple Leaf Gardens. But Harris' other moves were to fulfill an earlier promise he'd made in training camp.

"God rest his soul," Selwood says. "I love Billy Harris. He's a wonderful man. He told us in Edmonton, on Day 1, 'You've all given up part of your summers, and you will all play in this series.' And he was true to his word, without a doubt. However, when you score late to tie in Quebec City, you got some confidence. Then, you go into Toronto and win 4-1. I don't think that's the time to shake the roster up."

To a player on Team Canada, this is where they say the series started to slip away from them. They had the Soviets on the ropes, and they let them off.

Houle: "We felt that we had the right lineup when we won that game, the second game, in Toronto. So, why change the lineup when you're winning?"

Henderson: "As soon as I saw the lineup, it took the wind right out of our sails. It did mine, anyway."

Mark Howe: "I wasn't for that. I thought they should've stayed with the lineup we had, but that wasn't my spot, and we got drubbed pretty good."

With a depleted lineup, Harris had handed Team USSR a gift, one that Alexander Yakushev took full advantage of with a hat trick as the Soviets ran away with the game 8-5. Only a late third-period flurry of three goals in a minute-and-a-half for Team Canada saved the score from looking as lopsided as the lineups.

"We all agree that was the TSN Turning Point, as far as we were concerned," Selwood says. "It gave the Soviets more confidence, because we had them down a little bit. We had them second-guessing the way things were going, and then, they scored eight and got confidence going into Vancouver."

TURNING POINT

Team Canada impressed in the first two games, then made ill-advised lineup changes in Game 3.

GAME 4

"WE ALL FEEL LIKE WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED A LOT, SINCE NOBODY EXPECTED US TO DO THIS WELL" – Pat Stapleton

Despite the presence of the ageless Gordie Howe, it was the peerless Hull who awed the Soviets in '74. Hull went into the series saying all the right things about the NHL having left him off the team in '72, but it was his play in Game 4 that left the league scraping egg off its face.

"That game was Bobby Hull," Mark Howe says. "He had Tretiak on his toes. Bobby was teeing them up and letting them go pretty good."

But like in Quebec City, where Hull had scored two goals, his hat trick in Game 4 at Vancouver's Pacific Coliseum wouldn't be enough. With the lineup back intact, Team Canada jumped out to a three-goal lead after the first period and held a two-goal lead with less than five minutes to play in the third. It took Team USSR all of 51 seconds to tie the game 5-5.

"For me, that was the pivotal point of the series, that third period, as you look back," Mark Howe says. "If we win the game, you're on a high, you're feeling good, and you're up 2-1-1 in the series. Instead, you go over there, and you give one away. Having a

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one-game lead instead of being tied makes a big difference."

Yet, even with the late-game letdown, the WHA stars had, by then, proven their critics wrong. With the series even at 1-1-2, they'd done better than their NHL counterparts through the four games in Canada. Knowing they should've won three of them, they had good reason to believe they could still win the series.

Until they landed in Moscow.

SOVIET UNION

"IT IS VERY, VERY DIFFICULT TO WIN IN RUSSIA. I HAVE RENEWED ADMIRATION FOR WHAT TEAM CANADA DID HERE IN 1972. I DON'T KNOW HOW THE HELL THEY PULLED IT OFF" – Ralph Backstrom

After playing the first four games at home, Team Canada had a week to navigate the 5,000-mile flight to Moscow and to negotiate the transition to the extra 15 feet of international ice with a detour through Helsinki and Gothenburg for a pair of exhibition games against the Finnish and Swedish national teams. After back-to-back wins over the Finns and Swedes, the players were feeling good when they arrived in Moscow.

In hindsight, they should've been flying in the opposite direction.

"We thought, 'OK, we had the first four games in Canada in '72. We went over to Moscow. We weren't treated properly. We weren't certainly to the degree they were as far as accommodations," Selwood says. "We said, 'OK, why don't we have the first four in Moscow in '74 to see how we're treated and have the last four in Canada?' Which we felt at the time would be kind of an automatic."

It wasn't. In negotiations before the series, Soviet officials had insisted on the same sequence, and Canadian organizers failed to call their bluff. As soon as Team Canada landed in Moscow, everything that had galvanized the NHL stars in 1972 would discomfit and indiscipline the WHA stars in 1974.

Their Air Canada DC-8 had barely made it off the runway when the Soviet shenanigans began, as the plane sat on the tarmac for over an hour. When it did finally dock, instead of the red-carpet, five-star treatment the Soviets had received in Canada, the Canadians were greeted by armed guards and the full measure of the interminable Soviet bureaucracy.

"It took a long time after we passed by the customs," Houle says. "They had all kinds of stuff, asking questions and all. They were not that nice with us."

When the players, organizers and wives collected their luggage, they found their suitcases had been searched and their belongings rummaged. By the time they got through the airport, three hours later, the team had missed its evening practice. The first time the players would see the ice at the Luzhniki Ice Palace would be the game-day skate before Game 5. Instead, they headed straight for the hotel, the now infamous Intourist in downtown Moscow, where amenities were limited, smiles were in short supply, room keys didn't exist (players had to be let in and out of their room by a guard at the end of the hallway), and the piping left something to be desired.

"You'd turn the water on, and it started coming out rusty, so you let it run a little bit," Mark Howe says. "About a minute later, it came out damn-near brown."

When the players finally got settled into their spartan rooms, there were bugs to deal with, both inorganic and organic. ("And I'm not sure which ones were bigger," Selwood says.) Once asleep, bellhops delivered any missing luggage in the middle of the night, and some players received phantom phone calls and in-room intercom messages in the wee hours of the morning.

"That hotel over there was a pit," Selwood says. "My 'suite' was a bed that felt like an ironing board. You had one towel for you and your wife to shower. They treated us awful, in my opinion. Our food showed up missing, and we brought beer and stuff for the guys after games, and that all went missing."

The Canadian embassy did what it could, replacing the players' beer and the nearly 1,000 cans of in-game orange C-Plus soda, the Gatorade of the time. It also managed to resupply their missing steaks, though they couldn't control the local culinary arts.

"They would take the steaks and boil them," Mark Howe says. "That's how they cooked steaks over there."

HALFWAY HOME

The series was tied through four games in Canada, and spirits were high as they headed to Moscow.

Team Canada Heads For Russia With New Hope After Ice Showing

How Summit Series Looks

CANAM INTERNATIONAL HOCKEY TOURNAMENT
Guelph, Ontario, Canada
December 26-30 1974
Peewee Bantam Midget

GAME 5

"WE'RE LUCKY WE DIDN'T START THE THIRD WORLD WAR" – Gordie Howe

Dubbed the Friendship Series before it began, the series had become anything but by the time Team Canada touched down in Moscow. Along with their luggage, the players had other baggage – a payload of preconceptions from the politics of the time.

"Probably the biggest thing in '74, you were mentally programmed just to hate these people, literally," Mark Howe says. "There really was an absolute hatred for the people. And that was everybody, not just me. That's part of the mentality of the series."

As soon as the puck dropped for Game 5, that hatred was evident – on both sides. The hard but comparatively clean first four games were replaced with Soviet stickwork, Canadian retaliation and interesting officiating. As he did ahead of Game 1, Mikhailov set the tone early when he attempted to saw off Cheevers' ankles in the first minute of the game. With that, the relative discipline Team Canada had maintained back home disappeared as quickly as the players' steaks and beer.

Their collective frustration even overcame otherwise mild-mannered finesse center Ralph Backstrom, who drew a 10-minute misconduct when he protested a non-call after Valeri Kharlamov slew-footed him right underneath the nose of Polish referee Waldo Szczapek.

Even still, Team USSR could only eke out a 3-2 win, as Cheevers played perhaps his best game of the series. By now, Team Canada realized they weren't there to make friends, as politicians back home had hoped. It was war on ice.

"As far as we were concerned, we were the enemy," Lacroix says. "They knew we didn't like them, and I don't think they liked us either. Not just because of hockey. In general. They hated us more because we had freedom and they didn't."

GAME 6

"UNDER THE SOVIET CRIMINAL CODE, LEY SHOULD BE PUT IN JAIL FOR 15 DAYS" – Boris Kulagin

Ahead of a crucial Game 6, the players on Team Canada decided to gather together in one of their rooms to discuss a change in strategy. When they returned to Luzhniki Ice Palace, they found that the Soviets had tweaked theirs in kind. Less than three minutes in, Team Canada was down 2-0. By the time it ended, Team USSR had cruised to an easy 5-2 win.

The mounting frustration that began at the airport and the hotel, and carried over into Game 5, culminated in outright violence in Game 6. In the first period, Stapleton speared Alexander Gusev in the groin. In the second, Valeri Vasiliev pounded a defenseless Bruce MacGregor, who didn't fight back in the expectation Vasiliev would receive the mandatory misconduct for instigating under international rules. Instead, Soviet referee Victor Dombrowski gave them both five minutes for fighting. In the third period, Marty Howe shoved one of the linesmen after exchanging slashes with Yuri Lebedev. Then, just as Bobby Clarke had done in Game 6 in 1972, Rick Ley took aim at Kharlamov.

"Canadians, they are men; they do not like to lose," Tretiak says. "If they thought

REVENGE SERVED COLD

After the '72 Summit Series, Tretiak says Team Canada couldn't intimidate the Soviets in 1974.

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they could intimidate us, well, it was useless to intimidate us, because we'd already been through '72, and we already knew how Canadians play."

At the end of the game, depending on which report you read, Kharlamov either speared or butt-ended Ley or tapped him on the shoulder or backside. He then smiled and pointed at the scoreboard. Ley, who Kharlamov had beaten on two of the goals, lit him up with a flurry of punches that left the Soviet star bloodied and cleared the benches. "We thought Ricky was going to go to jail," Lacroix says. "Because in Russia, you go to jail if you do that."

Kulagin said as much after the game, while Canadian media and politicians called for Ley to be sent home. Ley would apologize to Kharlamov in person the next day.

The players on Team Canada returned to the hotel knowing there was no way for them to win the series. At best, they could only tie. Fresh off the loss, some of them gathered in the hotel lobby, where third-string goalie Gilles Gratton attempted to lighten the mood.

"He sat down and played the Russian national anthem on the piano, and he couldn't read a note," Henderson says. "It was unbelievable. It's a great piece of music, but it's too long to listen to when you've lost the friggin' game, I'll tell you that."

GAME 7

"I LOOKED UP AND SAW THE RED LIGHT GO ON. I FIGURED THAT WAS THE GAME FOR US"
– Bobby Hull

As time was ticking down in Game 7, with the score knotted 4-4, Team Canada mounted a last-second push to win the game. With

ROAD WOES

After a good start on home soil, Canada fell flat – both figuratively and, at times, literally – in Russia.

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a tie, the Soviets would take the series. But with a win, they could still even it up with another victory in Game 8.

For the second game in a row, Selwood took in the proceedings with Gratton and the other scratches from a makeshift players' area near the team's bench. He watched as the play swirled into the Soviets' zone with under 10 seconds left. Then, the puck came to Hull in the slot to Tretiak's right. "I remember sitting there, and we were just going crazy," Selwood says. "Nine seconds, eight seconds, counting down, and then, all of a sudden, he scores."

Part of the reason Team Canada had lost the previous two games was that, after scoring six of his team's 17 goals in Canada, Hull had gone goal-less in Moscow, slowed by a wonky knee he sustained back home. But just as he'd done in Games 1 and 4, Hull came up big when he was needed most.

Henderson, Backstrom and Gordie Howe, who all charged the net in case of a rebound, raised their arms. Team Canada's bench erupted, and some 3,000 Canadian fans in the arena went wild. The red light went on, as did the green light to signal the end of the game, only after which did the siren sound.

However, that's not how the on-ice official viewed the sequence of events. Perhaps he had visions of a one-way ticket to a gulag in Siberia. But just as he did after Petrov's goal in Game 2, Canadian referee Tom Brown waved off the goal and, with it, washed away Team Canada's hopes.

"We knew it was wrong," Selwood says. "We looked up several times, and there was X number of seconds left on the clock. Bobby scored in plenty of time. *Plenty* of time. We all went crazy, of course. We knew we were getting jobbed. I could use a worse word, but you're probably going to put this in print."

Exactly 1:32 earlier, Cheevers had watched from his goal crease as the timekeeper allowed four seconds to tick off the clock during a stoppage in play. Incensed, Cheevers raced over to the timekeeper's box and slammed his goalie stick against the glass. Brown forced Soviet officials to put two seconds back on the clock, but no more, and he would not push his luck with Hull's goal.

"Everybody thought it went in before time expired," Lacroix says. "But again, are you going to argue in Russia? I don't think the referee was going to get out alive if he'd changed his mind. How are you going to get back to the airport if you make the call in our favor in those days?"

GAME 8

"THE STATEMENT HAD NO CLASS. I HOPE THE RUSSIAN OFFICIALS INVOLVED ARE ASHAMED OF THEIR ACTIONS" – 'Wild' Bill Hunter

Unlike in '72, there would be no climatic Game 8 in '74. Team Canada had lost the series. An official protest was lodged with Soviet officials, and even the Canadian ambassador Robert Ford waded in, calling Hull's non-goal "absolute robbery," though he ignored demands to issue a formal diplomatic protest with the Kremlin. When it failed, there was talk of boycotting the final game, but, ultimately, it went ahead.

"We knew the series was over," Mark Howe says. "But I remember the guys in the locker room talking, 'Hey, we've got a lot of pride in this room. We know people may have given up on us and stuff, but don't quit on yourselves. Let's go out and perform, and let's try and win this hockey game.' "

Harris dressed a strong lineup, with only a few minor changes, while Kulagin rested five regulars, including Tretiak. Yet, even with the series secured, Soviet officials were intent on winning it off the ice, too. Ahead of the game, the Soviet Ice Hockey Federation sent a letter to Team Canada's organizers stating its players would leave the ice at the

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first sniff of dirty play. During the warmup, the public-address announcer then read the letter to the crowd in both Russian and English, garbled grammar and all:

> *"Taking into consideration the fact that the players of Team Canada '74 have repeatedly broken the agreement signed by the World Hockey Association and the USSR Ice Hockey Federation on adhering to the rules of the International Ice Hockey League, which was expressed by dirty play, appeals to the referee and spectators, the USSR Ice Hockey Federation states that such competitions in the spirit of the best traditions of sport and friendship, is forced, that at the first infringement of the above-mentioned agreement, to stop play of the last game."*

According to one report, when Gordie Howe heard the announcement, he leaned over to a Canadian scribe, smiled and said, "This is liable to be a short f---ing game."

In the end, the game went ahead and was played until the end, though not without more incidents. In the second period, Jim Harrison cracked Vladimir Lutchenko across the face with his stick, and then Vladimir Shadrin did much the same in a collision with Stapleton. Both drew blood, and both received five-minute majors from German referee Josef Kompalla.

Hull got his seventh goal of the series to lead all players in scoring, but Team USSR won the game 3-2, for a 4-1-3 series victory. After scoring three consecutive game-winners to close out '72, 31-year-old Henderson went pointless in Moscow in '74.

The Howes combined for 14 points in the series. Gordie, with half of those points himself, including three goals, had given his all in the seven games he played. Only Hull, Yakushev and Backstrom, Team Canada's MVP, produced more points. Gordie later called the series the second-biggest thrill of his career, after playing with Mark and Marty in Houston.

In the dressing room after the game, Mark was sitting next to Gordie when a reporter came over and asked his father how he felt. Mark recalls the exchange going like this:

> *"How do you feel, Gordie?"*
> *"Well, I feel like a winner."*
> *"But you lost the series!"*
> *"Yeah, but I get to go home."*

Gracious in defeat, with the game of life always in view, Gordie Howe had seen enough of the Soviet Union. At one point in the series, Gordie and Mark watched in horror from the bench as a doctor lifted up the thigh pad of an injured Soviet player, slid it up his leg, pulled down his hockey sock, then whipped out a needle and jammed it into his flesh from two feet away.

"I know how Dad was," Mark Howe says. "Dad always tried his best and did whatever he could, but when the game's over, the game's over. I'm sure he was disappointed he'd lost, but you have to put life in perspective, and he kind of did that in one little sentence. He had an incredibly quick wit and sense of humor."

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50TH ANNIVERSARY

Fifty years later, the easy out would be to blame the refereeing, and on the surface, it's an easy argument to make. Team Canada was assessed 44 minutes in penalties through the first four games and then 100 in the final four, while Team USSR was assessed 32 in Canada and 36 in the Soviet Union. But the numbers are misleading. Half of Team Canada's PIM in Moscow were 10-minute misconducts. Granted, this meant Team Canada played the equivalent of nearly a full game with a short bench, but the power-play chances were almost identical in the two countries. In Canada, where the Canadians outplayed the Soviets, the power plays were 18 to 12. In Moscow, they were 18 to 11. Both in favor of Team USSR.

"Part of what the Russians did, they kick you, they spear you in the back of the leg, they kick your legs out from underneath you, they did all sorts of s---," Mark Howe says. "Then you go do something back. And the refereeing over there, there's no way you can't say it wasn't partial. But as a group, we just fed right back into it. And it's not just in penalties. Your overall discipline in playing, when you run out of position to go hit a guy, and even though you got him really good, and you didn't get a penalty, now somebody else has to chase. We lost a lot of the composure and discipline we had. In the four games, for me, that was the biggest difference over there."

Fifty years on, the hatred is long gone on both sides, especially for Mark Howe, who calls his Russian teammates from his time with the Detroit Red Wings some of the finest people he ever met. But the two nations that waged war on ice in the 1974 Summit Series are remembering it much differently. With the Soviet Union no more, Russia is honoring the series with an ascent up a mountain, an alumni game and a documentary on Mikhailov ahead of his 80th birthday. In Canada, a handful of Canadian and Russian players will take part in a podcast of hockey historians called *Hockey Time Machine*, but there are no plans to summit the 17,257-foot Mount Lucania, the country's third-highest peak, or to remember the sequel after reliving the original two years ago. The enduring story of the Summit Series, so central to Canadian history, will remain half-written, with eight of the 16 games erased from the country's collective memory.

"Those games were interesting," Tretiak says. "But they're simply forgotten. Why? Because the Canadians lost. If Canada won, they would've remembered them. They would've forgotten '72, too, if we won. Because Canadians forget their losses, but when they win, they have a tough opponent." H

VIOLENT NIGHTS

Slashes, jabs and cheapshots became the norm as the series shifted to Russia for four games.

HERSHEY BEARS

HERSHEY HERO

Matthew Strome adds to the family trophy case as a valuable do-it-all AHLer **BY DILLON COLLINS**

THERE ARE NAMES synonymous with hockey: Richard, Hull, Staal, Stastny and Sutter, to name a few. The Strome name – carried by NHL veteran and Anaheim Ducks center Ryan, former CHL top scorer and current Washington Capitals setup man Dylan, and OHL Hamilton captain turned Calder Cup-clinching goal-scorer Matthew – is making a push for its place among the game's most famous monikers.

But to hear 25-year-old Matthew tell it, hockey found him long before he found it. "My mom always tells me the story of when I was, I think, four or five days old, Ryan had a hockey game and I was at the rink," Matthew said. "So, right from birth, I was pretty much at the hockey rink. If I wasn't at the rink, I'd be playing mini-sticks or road hockey. So, that's been the biggest part of my life ever since I was a young kid."

Ryan, 31, lit up the OHL en route to being drafted fifth overall by the New York Islanders in 2011. Seeing the brother with whom he had played mini-sticks and shinny put up 106 points with the Niagara IceDogs and go on to become a physical two-way forward in the NHL was an incentive for Matthew, who is six years Ryan's junior, to take a genuine interest in a career in the pros.

"When Ryan first made it to the OHL, I was like 10 years old," Matthew said. "And to see him leave home at 16 and go play junior hockey, I knew from that moment that I wanted to follow in his footsteps, and I know Dylan felt the same way."

Dylan, 27, won an OHL title with Erie in 2017, two years after being drafted third overall by the Arizona Coyotes. These days, he holds a key role with the Capitals, playing the part of setup man for Alex Ovechkin as the Russian sniper pursues Wayne Gretzky's all-time goal-scoring crown.

Matthew says that having Ryan and Dylan as models of consistency and sounding boards for all hockey-related matters has been an invaluable resource. "It's just so awesome to have those resources that if I'm going through a slump or maybe not playing that much, I know I always have those guys to turn to who have been through it all," Matthew said. "They've been my biggest fans, my biggest supporters, and I know whenever I need advice on something those are the two people I turn to most."

Matthew earned his stripes at a young age, captaining the U-16 Toronto Marlboros to an OHL Cup AAA title en route to becoming the first-ever draft selection for the OHL's Hamilton Bulldogs in 2015. He'd anchor the Dogs for four seasons, leading the club to a league championship in 2017-18.

Strome would have a trial-by-fire introduction to the pro game after the Philadelphia Flyers chose him in the fourth round of the 2017 draft. But since departing the Flyers system, he's become an all-around utility player – gritty, and with a knack for killing penalties – under Hershey coach Todd Nelson. Last season, Strome set an AHL career high in points and tied a bow on things by scoring the Calder Cup-clinching goal 1:06 into OT as Hershey roared past the Coachella Valley Firebirds in Game 6 on home ice.

"I was a 20-year-old playing against 35-year-olds," said Matthew of his introduction to the pro game. "You kind of have to start from the bottom, and I don't think my time in the Lehigh Valley/Philadelphia organization that I really bought into being a third- or fourth-line player, being on the penalty kill and really establishing a role. When I got to Hershey, the team was so deep my first year there, so I knew when I played that I had to contribute something if I wanted to get in the lineup. The coaching staff, especially Pat Wellar, the penalty-kill coach, really had trust in me, and he was very open and vocal about what my role was going to be.

"A lot of guys don't want to block shots, but every team needs that, especially if you want to have a championship-winning team. So I really bought into that role, and I think it has done so much for me in my pro career."

Reflecting on the "insane" Calder Cup final, and fresh off inking a two-year extension with the Bears, Matthew has found a home with one of the sport's winningest franchises. "In Hershey, they want to win," he said. "The fans want to win, the equipment guys, the trainers, the coaches, the management, everybody just wants to win. They want what's best for us. And if we keep winning championships, it's just gonna keep happening. So it's been awesome, my time there, and I'm super excited for the next two years." H

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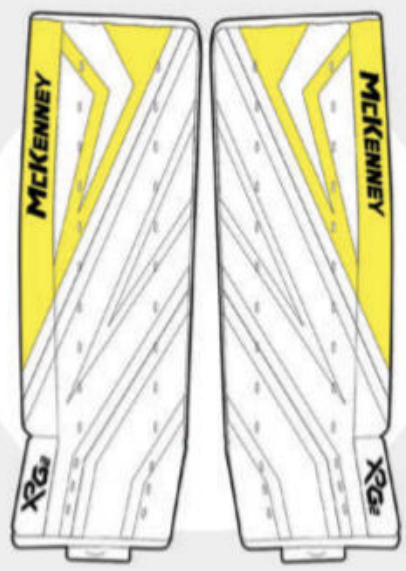

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ABBOTSFORD CANUCKS

UNDERSTANDING THE WHY

Longtime NHL assistant Manny Malhotra brings his own ideas to B.C. as AHL Abbotsford's rookie bench boss **BY DILLON COLLINS**

IF YOU WERE TO highlight a player past or present for off-ice greatness in the world of hockey, Manny Malhotra would undoubtedly make the short list.

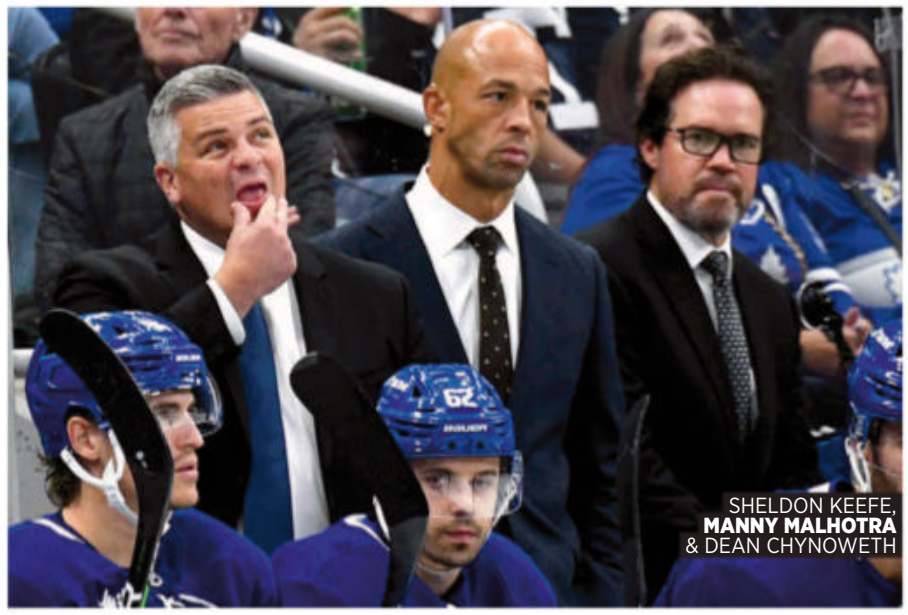
During his 16-year NHL career, Malhotra suited up for the New York Rangers, Dallas, Columbus, San Jose, Carolina, Montreal and, perhaps most notably, Vancouver. And in that time, the native of Mississauga, Ont., proved himself one of the league's top two-way players, earning Selke Trophy votes in five seasons and finishing as high as fifth in 2010-11.

Now, one of the 2000s' ultimate team players is, in the best possible way, a players' coach. After seven years as an NHL assistant, first under Travis Green in Vancouver, then under Sheldon Keefe in Toronto, Malhotra now has the chance to write his own story. And as the new coach of the AHL's Abbotsford Canucks, he does so while returning to his adopted home province of B.C. "I've always said I'm an adopted West Coaster," Malhotra said. "To be able to come back to the West Coast and into this organization that has revamped itself the last couple of years with the work of (Canucks' president of hockey ops) Jim (Rutherford) and (GM) Patrik Allvin and (coach Rick) Tocchet, the way they've turned this organization around to make it relevant again, to make it competitive, it's a very fun time to come back."

Malhotra had some of his greatest success in Vancouver, spending three seasons on a gritty and effective third line with Jannik Hansen and Raffi Torres. After retiring in 2016, Malhotra joined the Canucks as a development coach and then became an assistant in the summer of 2017. He then took the same job in Toronto in fall 2020.

Working with two of the sport's rising stars behind the bench – along with years spent (as a player) under the tutelage of Ken Hitchcock, Todd McLellan, Alain Vigneault and Dave Tippett, to name a few – Malhotra aims to apply all the knowledge he's gained and, as he puts it, help his players understand the *why*. "When I came into the league, it was, 'This is the system; this is how we're doing it,' " Malhotra said. "That's it. There was no *why* to the approach. Whereas, as I got older, understanding why we were doing things empowered me as a player to make my own reads and to do certain things, as long as the end result was what the team needed or wanted."

Working with Tocchet, the NHL's reigning Jack Adams Award winner, on ways to integrate systems across both the NHL and AHL levels, Malhotra, in essence, hit the books during the summer, studying the patterns of the 2023-24 Abbotsford squad. "He wants me to experiment and find my own coaching voice," said Malhotra of Tocchet, who aims to have a streamlined system for players across both the NHL and AHL, albeit with wiggle room for his AHL counterpart to implement the message. "He was very supportive of that kind of 80/20 mindset, as he put it.



"For me, coaching is all about getting the message across to the players, and there's no one way to do that. You realize that players and people are individuals. They learn differently. They hear differently. So just being able to teach the message in different forms to different players is something that excites me in terms of getting to know the guys and understanding what makes them tick."

Malhotra, in many ways, was the definitive utility player. He was a faceoff ace, with his win percentage ranking fourth in the NHL since 2005-06, and was a steady penalty killer. One may, then, expect a measured, defense-oriented approach from this first-year coach. And make no mistake, direct communication and a patient guiding hand will be at the forefront of the Malhotra experience. "One thing I've learned over the years about becoming a pro is learning what your role will be," he said. "A lot of guys come out of junior as big-time scorers. And it's the players that realize that if they're not going to be an elite scorer at the pro level, what's the next step and where can they carve a niche for themselves? Where can they make themselves a relevant player on the roster? So this year, helping guys learn those things and navigate and understand what their role will be, not only in Abbotsford but moving forward in their careers and wanting to extend their careers and helping them find a way to do that.

"Talking to guys in the organization, there's an excitement within the room. They want to get better. They want to win, and they want to push each other. For me as a coach coming in, those are real checkmarks and something I look forward to working with every day." H

TOP: PHOTO BY ABBOTSFORD CANUCKS; MIDDLE: DAN HAMILTON-USA TODAY SPORTS

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CINCINNATI CYCLONES

BETTER LATE THAN EARLY

Kyle Bollers could have turned pro three years ago, but he took the slow-cook approach, and it's paid big dividends **BY JACOB STOLLER**

KYLE BOLLERS HAD NO intention of playing pro hockey when he attended the Cincinnati Cyclones' 2021-22 training camp.

Bollers, then a student-athlete at Ryerson University (now Toronto Metropolitan University), was invited to the ECHL camp by Cyclones coach Jason Payne. Bollers had known Payne since he was a little kid because the two frequently crossed paths at different skills camps in the Greater Toronto Area, where Payne, a former minor-league enforcer, began his coaching career. "When you're a minority in a sport, you kind of just gravitate to each other," Bollers said.

Given that his own team's first few pre-season games were on the horizon, Ryerson coach Johnny Duco was weary about Bollers' weekend sojourn to Ohio. But, still, Duco let him go. Besides, Bollers just wanted to see how he fared against pro players, and Duco wasn't about to deny him that opportunity. But after a strong pre-season showing, Bollers earned an ECHL roster spot.

"After a couple of days, he was calling me saying, 'Well, I might stay,' " Duco said. "We had a game two days from that point, against Western. And we told him, 'Hey, if you're going to be part of this team, you need to be at that game. Bottom line.' "

Bollers was torn. Making the team out of camp seemed like an opportunity he couldn't pass up. Payne, though, wanted Bollers to look at the big picture. "It was a hard decision for him," Payne said. "But I told him, 'I need you to go back to school. And once you finish your education, there will be a spot here waiting for you.' "

Three years later, Payne made good on that promise. He signed Bollers in the spring after Bollers wrapped up a marvelous three-year run at TMU, where the now 25-year-old evolved into one of the top forwards in all of U Sports – scoring the fourth-most goals (43) in that time and earning a spot on his division's first all-star team each season. "He didn't come in as a five-star recruit, but he quickly became a five-star player," Duco said. "He exceeded every expectation."

Bollers scored just 10 goals in 168 OHL games with Saginaw and Oshawa, where he was deployed primarily as a bottom-six winger. His disappointing OHL career left a sour taste in his mouth ahead of his 20-year-old season, which he spent with the OJHL's Brantford 99ers after being cut by Oshawa. So he set out to prove everyone wrong, working tirelessly at his craft ahead of 2019-20. "Before then, I just would say that I wanted it," Bollers said. "I would do what was put in front of me, but I wasn't doing the extra stuff I needed to do."

After leading the OJHL in goals (39) and tying for the league lead in points (86), Bollers committed to Ryerson for 2020-21. But the pandemic wiped out what would've been his first year. Yet for Bollers, that "lost season" wasn't so lost after all. "That was the biggest turning point in my career," Bollers said. "I took the extra steps I needed to in that year off. Some guys weren't putting in the hours and weren't working hard, and I was just continuously putting in the hours."

Bollers started 2021-22 in the bottom six, but that didn't last long. By the next game, he was already on the team's second power-play unit, and he scored his first goal. Then, he posted three goals and five points in a three-game series against Lakehead University.

WINDS OF CHANGE
Bollers got a taste of the ECHL with the Cyclones last season. This year, he'll be with the team full-time.

TOP: PHOTO BY CINCINNATI CYCLONES; BOTTOM: PHOTO BY EMILY SIMONETTA

METRO BOOMIN'

Bollers scored 43 goals in 61 games over three seasons at TMU and was a divisional first-team all-star each year.

"He was on our third line, and we quickly realized that this might be our best line," Duco said. "And Kyle was the motor on that line. He was on the second power-play unit, and then it quickly became our first unit because he was on it."

Bollers finished his first U Sports campaign tied for 10th in the nation in scoring, and he also established himself as a trusted penalty-killer.

His knack for killing penalties and his offensive skills landed him a role with Team Canada at the World University Games during the 2022-23 season, where he helped his country win gold. "He became really good at walking the fine line of being in good spots defensively but also anticipating a play and picking his spots to break up a play and generate a counterattack," Duco said.

And virtually all his goals were scored at even strength. "A lot of guys can score on the man advantage," Payne said. "But when you're scoring that much at even strength, like Kyle did, it speaks volumes to his understanding of playing off the puck at even strength."

Bollers is a student of the game. "He's just a hockey junkie," Payne said. "He studies the game. He studies his shifts. He's always looking at what he can do to make himself better."

Even with Bollers seemingly being pre-ordained for the pros by his third and final season at TMU, his approach never changed. "He'd be the first one at the rink every morning," Duco said. "Even on a Monday at 8 a.m. after getting six points on the weekend. Guys took note of that."

As his U Sports career wound down, Bollers had left little doubt he made the right choice to return to school. Payne had no hesitation in following up on that promise he made. And Bollers, who attracted interest from several other ECHL clubs, was happy to return to Ohio. "Cincinnati's been in the back of my mind for the last three years," Bollers said. "I was hoping to get a deal in the American Hockey League, but if I was going to go to the ECHL, I knew I was for sure going to play for the Cincinnati Cyclones."

What he didn't know, though, was that he'd make history with Cincinnati. On March 30 against the Wheeling Nailers, in his second career pro game, Bollers was part of the first all-Black starting lineup in professional hockey, along with Josh Burnside and Elijah Gonsalves, Landon Cato and Jalen Smereck. "In the moment, you kind of don't realize the impact that it's going to have on other people," Bollers said. "But after it happened, it felt really special. I'm thankful Jason gave me and the four other guys on the ice that kind of opportunity."

The table is set for Bollers to evolve into a key contributor for Cincinnati this season. And as Bollers heads into his first full pro season, Payne's objectives for him are as simple as they are freeing: "He's just got to be himself." H

TOP: PHOTO BY CURTIS MARTIN; LEFT: PHOTO BY CINCINNATI CYCLONES; RIGHT: PHOTO BY EMILY SIMONETTA

PRINCE GEORGE COUGARS

RAVE REVIEWS

Whether for his mountaintop heroics at 12 or for his WHL star turn at 16 last year, Josh Ravensbergen is no stranger to generating positive headlines **BY CAROL SCHRAM**

NESTLED INTO BRITISH Columbia's rugged mountain slopes, North Vancouver is well-known for its natural beauty and plentiful outdoor activity options, including skiing, hiking and mountain biking.

These days, the region has also developed a reputation for breeding some of the world's best hockey players, including back-to-back No. 1 overall NHL draft picks Connor Bedard and Macklin Celebrini.

In 2025, North Van's draft hype will center around goalie Josh Ravensbergen. At a time when Canada's goaltending pipeline has been short on top-end talent, the lanky 17-year-old has propelled himself into the conversation as a potential first-round NHL pick after just a single season with the WHL's Prince George Cougars.

This summer, looking to build off his impressive debut and further solidify his draft stock, Ravensbergen scaled back his grand plans for an epic back-country camping trip in the North Shore Mountains to focus on training and recovery. "I've spent a lot of time getting back to feeling good and trying to strengthen the hip area," he said. "The glute. The inner thigh. Still a little bit to go, but it's been good so far."

He has also been working with mental coach Pete Fry, whose clients have included other WHL-alums-turned-NHLers Stuart Skinner, Joel Hofer and Jiri Patera.

JAMES DOYLE/WHL

Fry's training has helped Ravensbergen to maintain his focus when he's on the ice – to avoid looking at the clock and stay in a positive mental state. "Believing that you can achieve anything when you put your mind to it is the biggest thing," he said. "I'm enjoying that."

In July, the 6-foot-4 stopper was invited to don the maple leaf for the first time. At the

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

While the vast majority of NHL goalies catch left, Ravensbergen hopes to become a rare big-league righty.

World Junior Summer Showcase, he had an opportunity to audition for a roster spot for this winter's world juniors in Ottawa while facing down shots from some of the best U-20 players in the world. "It's been an incredible year," he said. "A year ago, I was just trying to get myself a spot in the 'Dub,' and now, I'm here. There's a lot more to go to get to where I want to be, but I've enjoyed the journey so far."

Early on in his hockey journey, Ravensbergen chose to step between the pipes because playing goal meant more time on the ice: he didn't like waiting in line during practice drills. And even though he writes with his right hand and wears his baseball glove on his left, he catches right when he's in the crease. "When I started to get into hockey, my cousins had

a road-hockey set that had a right-handed catcher, so that's kind of what I got used to," he said. "I actually started off lefty. But it felt weird, so I switched after a year."

It's a rare trait these days. The only righties to play more than 10 games in the NHL last season were Charlie Lindgren, Logan Thompson and Karel Vejmelka. In Ravensbergen's early years, this quirk led to some long drives across the Lower Mainland to the region's biggest goalie shop out in Surrey, B.C., the only place that carried gear for righties.

During his 2021-22 U-17 season with the Vancouver North West Hawks of the B.C. Elite League, a growth spurt took Ravensbergen past the six-foot mark. But, with regular U-17 schedules still disrupted by the pandemic, he was passed over when the WHL Prospects Draft was held in December 2021.

Ravensbergen's goalie coach with the Hawks, Sean Murray, had spent two seasons with the Cougars between 2016 and 2018. He talked up his young charge to his old team, and after Ravensbergen won the BCEHL's U-17 championship, he joined the Cougars for his first WHL training camp in the fall of 2022 before returning to the Hawks' U-18 side for one season.

In April 2023, after Ravensbergen compiled a 15-2-3 record and earned a spot on the BCEHL's all-star team, he signed with Prince George. He was confident he could win a roster spot as a 16-year-old and begin his major-junior journey. "I always believed in myself, but there's a lot of unknowns going into that," he said. "I went in, had a really good start this season, and I ended up sticking. So, I was really happy with that."

Sharing the net with Ty Young, a 2022 Vancouver Canucks pick, Ravensbergen got the nod from coach Mark Lamb to start the season opener against the Tri-City Americans. He made 28 stops in a 9-0 win, pitching the first of six shutouts he recorded in his first three months of action.

That game set the tone for the season, which saw the Cougars claim first place in the WHL's Western Conference. With Zac Funk, Riley Heidt and rookie Terik Parascak all finishing in the top 10 in league scoring, Ravensbergen and Young received plenty of offensive support as they shared duties and combined for just 187 goals against, ranking second in the league. "We had a great team up there last year," Ravensbergen said. "My first game, I think we got up 5-0 in the first period. That definitely helps take the nerves off."

At the end of October, Ravensbergen earned the first of his three goalie-of-the-week honors. In November, he was named the WHL's goalie of the month. And by season's end, his 26-4-2 record and .907 save percentage earned him the Game 1 start in the playoffs.

The Cougars reached the Western Conference final before falling to the Portland Winterhawks in six games. Over 12 post-season outings, Ravensbergen logged a .931 SP, including three more shutouts.

As he prepares for his second WHL campaign, his rise through Western Canada's goaltending ranks has been meteoric. But the attention that he's receiving is not entirely new.

In 2019, at age 12, Ravensbergen made headlines and earned recognition from North Vancouver officials and Canada's then-governor general, Julie Payette. A day of skiing on Grouse Mountain quickly became a rescue mission for a child dangling from an overhead chairlift. Fast-thinking and resourceful, Ravensbergen and his friends re-purposed some nearby safety equipment into a makeshift net they successfully used to catch the child, who was uninjured.

Just another great save.

The Spitfires bottomed out last season. Now, Belchetz will try to guide the team back to the top of the table.

WINDSOR SPITFIRES

WINDS OF CHANGE

The Spitfires never imagined they'd be picking first overall in the 2024 OHL draft, but adding Ethan Belchetz to the organization was a perfect consolation prize after a trying year

BY TONY FERRARI

WHEN THE WINDSOR Spitfires began their 2023-24 OHL season, they were coming off incredible back-to-back campaigns, having followed up a trip to the league final in 2022 with a finish atop the Western Conference standings the next season. Those within the Spits organization understood there would be an inevitable decline, with some key veterans aging out, but no one expected the club to implode immediately.

But so it was, as Windsor won just six of its first 25 games while suffering several embarrassing blowouts and playing generally uninspired hockey. Entering December with the season already seemingly lost, GM Bill Bowler altered course. "We had to make an adjustment when we realized where we were just before Christmas," he said. "We knew we weren't as bad as our record, but we knew we needed to set our sights on next season and beyond."

And as Bowler began selling off established OHLers and his Spitfires continued to flounder at the bottom of the standings, his scouting staff also had to adjust. Suddenly, instead of trying to get extra viewings of kids projected to go in the mid-to-late first round of the 2024 OHL draft, the Spits' talent hawks were closely watching the cohort's top-end talent. That included discerning whether those kids planned to stay in Ontario and play major junior or leave for the NCAA – and whether Windsor was somewhere those who stayed would be willing to play.

BILL BOWLER & **ETHAN BELCHETZ**

REMO AGOSTINO/WINDSOR SPITFIRES

Through that process, the Spitfires identified winger Ethan Belchetz as their big prize. Already standing 6-foot-4 and weighing more than 220 pounds, Belchetz is a powerful player who brings offensive punch and a physical edge. "It's a slam dunk," said Bowler at a post-draft press conference. "This was so simple."

Belchetz accomplished everything he could have hoped

for last year. He led his hometown Oakville Rangers U-16 AAA team to an OHL Cup championship and won tournament MVP honors. He led the OMHA U-16 circuit in goals and points. That was good enough to earn him the OMHA West Player of the Year award.

Given his hulking frame, it shouldn't be surprising that Belchetz physically dominated the youth level, using his strength and size to manhandle opposing players. He compares his game to that of players like Jamie Benn as well as Matthew and Brady Tkachuk. "All of those big, strong power forwards in the game today are who I relate my game to," Belchetz said. "They just dominate the game down low and in the corners. That's who I really want to play similar to."

But while Belchetz is quick to draw the comparison to those current NHLers, he says the genesis of his power-forward style actually came from elsewhere. "I wear No. 61 because of Rick Nash," he said. "He's the ultimate power forward. He's physical. Can score. Skilled. He has everything."

It is immediately apparent from how Belchetz plays that he incorporates parts of all of those players into his game. He brings some of Benn's nastiness. He can get physical in the corners and along the boards to win puck battles like a Tkachuk. And like Nash, Belchetz has the combination of power and skill to go through one defender with his shoulder down and then dangle past a second on his way to the net.

For Belchetz and the Spitfires, the stylistic identities mesh perfectly. Windsor has always loved players who work hard and play an honest 200-foot game. And the team's fans love to cheer on a player who drives the net and jams in a loose puck just as much as they do the one who dangles everyone en route to firing the puck over the goalie's shoulder. Thankfully for them, Belchetz can do both.

The Spitfires ultimately finished 19th in the 20-team OHL and subsequently won the right to select first overall in the 2024 draft. Leading up to draft day, Bowler described the kind of player he wanted to bring in. Several times, he stressed character, grit and power as vital attributes. When Belchetz's name was mentioned, Bowler grinned ear-to-ear, though he noted that nothing had been finalized and the team was going through the final process of locking down its decision.

Days later, Bowler announced Belchetz's selection and touched on all of those points again. Everyone in the Spitfires organization mentioned that Belchetz always looked out for his teammates on and off the ice. Bowler added that Belchetz's character was a big reason he won as much as he did last year.

When asked about his penchant for winning, Belchetz also cited off-ice chemistry as a prerequisite. "You have to be tight with your teammates," he said. "Everyone has to buy into the system if you want to win, and that's why we became champions. I want to come into this organization, meet everybody and start to build those relationships."

OMHA GOODNESS

Belchetz led the OMHA in goals and points last year on his way to a league championship and MVP honors.

Despite being selected first overall and coming off an incredible U-16 season, Belchetz wasn't planning on resting on his laurels. He was in the gym and on the ice all summer long. "My skating, more specifically, my first-step speed, is what's biggest for me," he said. "Being a bigger guy, you have to get moving quick."

Becoming a great player doesn't happen without hard work. Belchetz knows that. And, despite having just turned 16 at the end of March, he's ready to step into the spotlight.

It wouldn't be a surprise to see Belchetz play a prominent role on a Spits team lacking top-end talent beyond captain and 2024 Los Angeles Kings first-rounder Liam Greentree. The two may even play on the same line if the young gun can come into camp and blow the doors off. And with his size and skill, Belchetz may very well do just that.

TOP: REMO AGOSTINO/WINDSOR SPITFIRES; RIGHT: STEVEN ELLIS/DAILY FACEOFF

NO. 1 AGAIN
Just like his father, Pierre, 29 years ago, Maddox Dagenais, middle, was the top pick of the QMJHL draft.

QUEBEC REMPARTS

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Maddox Dagenais, the No. 1 pick in the 2024 QMJHL draft, already has a knack for making history **BY WILL MACLAREN**

FANS IN QUEBEC CITY are already learning Maddox Dagenais' name. It certainly helps when it's plastered on billboards around the city (*"Bienvenue avec les Remparts,"* the signs proclaim). But even before citizens of one of the QMJHL's cornerstone cities were introduced from nearly 100 feet above to the teenager they hope will become the latest in a long line of legends, Dagenais had already reached new historical heights, starting with the way he entered the league.

In June, the Remparts made the 16-year-old sniper the top pick of the 2024 QMJHL draft. Along with his father, Pierre, who was alongside him that day, the pair became the first father-son duo in league history to both be No. 1 draft picks. "It was amazing just being there with my parents and seeing all the players waiting to be drafted," Maddox said. "But then, to hear my name get called first was incredible. Both my dad and I, we worked so hard to achieve what we did."

Pierre set the wheels in motion for this unique event 29 years ago, when he was the first-ever choice of the expansion Moncton Alpines (now Wildcats). The sense of *deja vu*, not to mention the tension, was not lost on the elder Dagenais. "I was more nervous than I was on my own draft day," Pierre said. "Leading up to it, there's so much pressure. The media exposure increases. As a dad, I just wanted Maddox to enjoy himself and hope he didn't become affected by that spotlight. For the next few days, from the point he heard his name called onward, it was kind of overwhelming. He ended up handling everything so well."

Something else Maddox handles well is the puck, yet another trait that runs in the family. With 42 goals and 81 points in 35 games with the Quinte Red Devils of the OMHA under-16 ranks, Maddox displayed not only the same release and nose for the net that made his father a star a generation earlier, but he also showed off a tremendous skating stride and the vision to seemingly generate chances out of thin air. And to top it off, he also honed his skill on the dot to become one of the best faceoff takers in his cohort.

But there's another, less tangible, aspect to Dagenais' game. Some might describe it using various obscenities commonly reserved for those who cut people off in traffic (possibly while admiring an eye-catching billboard). The man who swung a trade on the draft floor with the Cape Breton Eagles to grab the No. 1 pick finds somewhat gentler terms. "He's got grit," said Remparts GM Simon Gagne. "A real edge to his game. Beyond that, he's so mature off the ice, especially for a 16-year-old."

Pierre, 46, knows a thing or two about sizing up talent as well. After a stellar junior career in which he scored 66 goals and 133 points in his final 'Q' campaign with Rouyn-Noranda, Pierre embarked on a 14-year pro career that included 142 NHL games with New Jersey, Florida and Montreal. In fact, Gagne, who faced off against Dagenais in both junior and the pros, insists the father of his top prospect can still score seemingly at will while suiting up at Habs alumni events.

Pierre also maintains a presence in the hockey world as an agent with Maloney Thompson and as the director of hockey development for the World Elite Performance Center in Belleville, Ont. He readily adds to Gagne's assessment of his son. "We can measure the speed, the size, all of that," Pierre said. "But the will? How badly do you want to be a hockey player? Maddox's mindset is incredible. I hope it carries him to the next level. He's got the desire. Yet with all of that, he's still a very humble kid."

VINCENT ETHIER/QUEBEC REMPARTS

Would Maddox agree with those descriptors? Consider what he highlighted as one of the minor benefits to entering the QMJHL. "With my dad getting drafted first overall, I looked at it as kind of a competition to do the same," he said with a chuckle.

That desire can work to other advantages as well. For how does a teenager avoid the distractions that come via suitors from not one but three leagues? (Besides the QMJHL, Maddox was also eligible for the OHL draft and had visited NCAA hotbeds North Dakota and Boston University.) "I just tried to keep being the player I am," he said. "I also tried to work every day on some aspect of my

> "TO HEAR MY NAME CALLED FIRST WAS INCREDIBLE. **BOTH MY DAD AND I WORKED SO HARD** – Maddox Dagenais

VINCENT ETHIER/QUEBEC REMPARTS

game I can improve on, whether it's speed, strength or something else. Between that and focusing on being prepared for the next game really helped take away from the pressure of the draft."

Naturally, the pressure will continue, only in different forms. The Remparts, who missed the playoffs for the first time in their 27-year history last season, are looking at a long road back to the top. Gagne, who has preached building from within since moving into the GM's chair last summer, will maintain that same level of patience with his new phenom.

"We're not going to put pressure on Maddox to put the team on his shoulders," Gagne said. "He's going to have to adapt to playing 64 games, living with billets and travel. If we see flashes of what he can bring to the team in the years to come, we're happy with that. At that age, one shift, you're facing another rookie. Next time out, you're going in the corner against a 20-year-old. As an organization, we'll make sure he's able to face whatever challenges come his way."

With the support of family and his new team, Maddox now wants to simply show he can perform at the junior level, just like his dad did once upon a time. But that modesty belies all the markings of a stellar future at the next level and beyond. All signs point to it. H

USA NO. 1
Potter led the NTDP under-17 team in scoring last season. This year, he's skipping ahead to the college game.

ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS

LIKE MOTHER, LIKE SON

Cullen Potter didn't play organized hockey until he was 10, but the 2025 NHL draft prospect got plenty of ice time with a four-time world champion – his mom **BY RYAN KENNEDY**

IN AN ERA WHERE sports specialization can be suffocating for kids, center Cullen Potter proves there is a different path. The 2025 NHL draft prospect and Arizona State freshman didn't play organized hockey until he was 10, and even then, it was only to take part in the vaunted Brick Invitational Tournament in Edmonton. Instead, he spent his youth doing skills development, playing multiple sports and skating on outdoor rinks with his parents. And while all parents are proud of what their kids achieve, it does carry a little more weight when your mom is four-time world champion and Olympic gold medallist Jenny Potter of Team USA.

Jenny and her husband, Rob, work in player development, teaching on-ice skills and off-ice training to everyone from little kids to pros through their company, Potter's Pure Hockey. For Cullen, it was special having a mom who'd reached the pinnacle of the sport. "Definitely a big influence," Cullen said. "She loves the game, and I'd go to the outdoor rinks and pass around with her and play pickup games. It was cool to see her play, because she has some pretty sweet hands. She's a really good player. It's cool to see how much your parents love the game and how much they want to see you succeed."

RENA LAVERTY/USA HOCKEY

Jenny and her husband grew up playing multiple sports and wanted to pass that on to their kids, Cullen and his older sister, Madison. "I actually didn't play on a team until I was 14," Jenny said. "I competitively swam. I did cross-country running. I did a bunch of sports because my parents wanted me to be active. Cullen swam and played lacrosse, and our daughter went to Notre Dame for swimming."

Cullen was raised in Minnesota's Twin Cities area, where the outdoor rinks made for some fun competition growing up. "Our best memories are from the outdoor rinks because there was no structure," Jenny said. "You just went out and had fun. When he was five, six, seven, he'd be playing with guys I grew up with, and he'd always find a way to come out with the puck without getting trampled. It's been fun to watch him progress throughout the years."

Cullen played for the Northeast Wisconsin Jr. Gamblers in Green Bay in 2021-22 when his parents ran the program, then set out for a new challenge. He spent a year in Texas with the Dallas Stars Elite program (the Potters knew the coaches there), then joined USA Hockey's National Team Development Program. "I loved 'The Program' and the guys," he said. "Every day was a grind, but you're doing it with your team, so it was definitely a lot of fun and a close-knit group."

Potter led the NTDP's U-17 team in scoring last season with 46 points in 54 games. But this summer, he made the decision to forego his second year with the program, instead opting to head straight to college. While it's rare for a player to leave the NTDP after one season, it's not unprecedented – Florida Panthers prospect Gracyn Sawchyn did the same thing two years ago, winning a WHL championship with the Seattle Thunderbirds one season later. For Potter, it was a chance he couldn't pass up. "I was presented the opportunity, and I was ahead in my schoolwork, so I felt I was ready to play at the next level," he said. "I believe it will help me in my draft year, too, just challenging myself at another level to play against older guys. It's a great opportunity for me."

The Sun Devils will be a fun group to watch this season. Thanks to the transfer portal, Potter's new teammates will include NHL draft picks Cruz Lucius, Artem Shlaine and Noah Beck. The formerly independent team also has a conference to play in, the NCHC, which was another plus for Potter. "It's an up-and-coming program with a lot of upside and a lot to offer," he said. "Joining the NCHC this year is cool because we'll be playing (past) national champions like North Dakota and Denver."

Sizing up the situation: Potter, left, spent much of the summer in the weight room at Arizona State.

Potter spent the summer skating in Tempe, living with other freshmen Sun Devils in dorms and getting to know the campus. He had visited Arizona State unofficially years ago when his Dallas team played a tournament in the area, and he also has cousins nearby. Originally, he had planned on going to Michigan State but switched up when he decided to fast-track to the NCAA as a 17-year-old. So what does he bring to the ASU lineup? Might as well ask his skills coach/Olympian mom. "He's a very dynamic player," Jenny said. "The better players he plays with, the more you see he's capable of. He's an unbelievable playmaker, and he can bury goals. He's got great speed, good hands, and he's a fun player to watch."

Jenny sees her son thriving on teams that move the puck quickly, like the old Russian squads or the Pavel Datsyuk-era Detroit Red Wings. For his part, Cullen likes to watch current stars such as Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Mathew Barzal – speedsters who make plays at a high pace while also bringing a two-way game to the table. At 5-foot-9 and 161 pounds, Potter knows he needs to bulk up – which is why a summer in Arizona State's weight room was so convenient – but he also wants to work on his shot and defensive play. With fellow former NTDPers James Hagens going to Boston College, Logan Hensler off to Wisconsin and Shane Vansaghi at Michigan State, Potter isn't the only 2025 draft prospect hitting the NCAA ranks. But he sure has one of the most interesting origin stories. And if he can rely on all those lessons he got from his parents on the way up, he'll be a fun player to watch in the coming years. H

> "I FELT I WAS READY TO PLAY AT THE NEXT LEVEL. I BELIEVE IT WILL HELP ME IN MY DRAFT YEAR – Cullen Potter

The Philippines became an associate member of the IIHF for the first time in 2016.

HOCKEY NIGHT IN MANILA

Ian McGrath went to the Philippines for work. Once he got there, he found a side gig as an assistant coach with the country's budding national team **BY JARED CLINTON**

WHEN CANADIAN FOR-eign service worker Ian McGrath was first approached about a job opening in the Philippines, he ran through a mental checklist. A place he could envision himself with his wife and four kids? Check. Good gig? Absolutely. Tropical island? That didn't hurt. And he chalked it up as a nice bonus that he'd have the opportunity to get in some scenic rounds of golf.

But as he started to prepare for the move, McGrath was told about another, unexpected benefit: a decent hockey league – one he could hop into and play a few times a week. This, he admits, he met with disbelief. "I thought, if there is a hockey league, it's probably like the league I heard about in India where it's in a shopping mall, has pillars in the middle of the ice and you have to play around the pillars," he said. "That would just suck."

When he arrived in the country in 2021, though, he came to realize the league was no joke. Though it was, coincidentally, based out of a mall in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, there was no playing around pillars. It was organized, fast-paced, and the competitive division was springing back to life after the departure of several North American and European expats during the pandemic. So, McGrath rustled up some equipment and started hitting the ice two or three nights a week.

It was through the league that McGrath met some members of the nascent national team, which had laid its foundation in the mid-aughts and, in 2016, became an associate member of the IIHF by way of the Federation of Ice Hockey League, the country's aptly named national federation.

He'd become fast enough friends with his newfound teammates, in fact, that he earned an invitation to take part in the Filipino national hockey team's golf tournament. And it was after that round McGrath – whose career has taken

PHOTOS COURTESY OF IAN MCGRATH

HE SHOPS, HE SCORES
Upon arrival, McGrath discovered the only suitable hockey rink in the Philippines was in a mall in Manila.

him to Senegal, Lebanon and Turkey – unknowingly set into motion one of the most whirlwind experiences of his life. "I'm joking about how to get on the team: 'Who do I have to talk to? I could definitely crack the lineup,' " McGrath said. "They said, 'You can't play! You're not Filipino! But we do need a coach.' And I was like, 'I don't want to coach.' I played at Carleton University. Growing up, I played (Jr. B) in Canada. The last thing I wanted to do is coach. I'm still convinced in my head I could be a player."

And he would have been content remaining one had a run-in with Juhani Ijas not ultimately changed McGrath's mind.

A former defenseman in Finland's third-tier pro ranks, Ijas had pivoted to a dual role in the late stages of his on-ice career, suiting up in the United Arab Emirates and Thailand while acting in a coaching capacity with their respective national-team programs. After guiding Thailand into the IIHF's World Championship tournament – albeit the lower rungs – for the first time in 2019 and later leading them to a bronze medal, Ijas accepted the gig as coach of the Philippines' men's team with an eye toward the 2023 IIHF Div. IV World Championship. Not long after his arrival in 2022, he and McGrath made acquaintances, found themselves talking shop and realized they shared a similar defense-first philosophy. That led Ijas to extend McGrath an invitation to assist with practices.

As it tends to, one thing led to another. One practice turned into two, two into three and the third into a role as volunteer assistant coach. McGrath had gone from beer-league blueliner to part-time talent scout as he and Ijas set about assembling the national-team roster.

While nary a soul will conflate top Filipino players with their elite international counterparts, McGrath estimates the skill of those at the top end of the Philippines' hockey talent pool to a Jr. B or C level. But as is often the case in budding hockey cultures, the difference between Filipino players and those in higher-ranked nations results from a confluence of cost, access and opportunity.

In a country of more than 110 million people, the aforementioned shopping-mall rink in Manila is the only suitable surface for hockey. It puts ice time at a premium, while the location makes playing regularly impossible for some participants. And while the dedication of national-team players should never be questioned, their attention is invariably divided in what is ultimately an amateur pursuit. "We have a range of guys on the team," McGrath said. "One guy is opening a new casino. He's our starting goalie. A couple of guys are in law school; they're in the articling stage. Other guys have their own businesses. One is an executive at an insurance company. So, they all play hockey as a hobby."

That hockey is a pastime for the top Filipino players presents a unique challenge, too. As such, the newfangled national-team coaching staff, led by Ijas and supported by McGrath, set about breaking some of the players' old habits. Among the best players, the primary objective was putting together a highlight reel, not playing a 200-foot game. "Juhani really hammered home the need to play a five-man defensive setup, use a two-man forecheck, angling into the boards and having a third guy high," McGrath said. "And he preached a physical element to the game that the guys had never played here."

> **"THEY SAID, 'YOU CAN'T PLAY (ON THE NATIONAL TEAM)! YOU'RE NOT FILIPINO! BUT WE DO NEED A COACH'** – Ian McGrath

Over the next several months, McGrath settled into his role of coaching the defense and special teams while Ijas hammered home the details. It was all with one goal in mind: winning gold at the World Championship in Mongolia. For the Philippines, it would be the first foray onto the international stage after a four-year odyssey. COVID

derailled the national team's planned World Championship debut in 2020 and 2021, and the Philippines was forced to withdraw from the 2022 tournament due to pandemic-related challenges.

But just as McGrath and Co. were preparing to pack their bags for Mongolia, he had an important piece of business to attend to: getting the all-clear from his higher-ups. "I go back into work, and I tell the (Canadian) ambassador, 'Look, I don't know how you're going to take this, but I've been coaching the hockey team for the last eight months, and they want me to go to Mongolia. Of course, I'm a Canadian diplomat, but I'll really be working with the Philippine team,' " McGrath said. "And the ambassador is a huge hockey fan, too, and he was like, 'That's fantastic! You couldn't be any more Canadian than coaching an ice-hockey team in the Philippines.' "

With that taken care of, McGrath made the trip to the tournament. And it was there, sandwiched between twin 14-0 routs of Indonesia and Kuwait, that the Philippines prepared for a showdown with the hosts, tournament-favorite, Mongolia. In the first frame, the Philippines jumped out to a 3-0 lead, only for the Mongolians to claw back with three tallies of their own in the second. Then, tied 3-3 in the third, the teams went goal-for-goal, leading to a 6-6 tie that sent the de facto gold-medal game to overtime. Just 72 seconds into the extra frame, the Philippines' Eishner Sibug netted the winner.

> **"WE HAVE A RANGE OF GUYS ON THE TEAM. THEY ALL PLAY HOCKEY AS A HOBBY** – Ian McGrath

The gold-medal victory made headlines in the Philippines, earning the team not only promotion to the Div. III B World Championship – where they finished fourth this past February – but a trip to Malacanang Palace to visit the Filipino president. More importantly, the team's success has given rise to a new generation of national-team hopefuls. McGrath said he was stunned by how hard young players who've

MOVING ON UP

The Philippines earned promotion to the Div. III B worlds, where they finished fourth in February.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF IAN MCGRATH

never been part of the program were fighting to earn a spot. With the 2025 World Championship in the offing, as well as the 2025 South East Asian Games and 2025 Asian Winter Games, the national team has plenty to look forward to.

The life of a diplomat is nomadic by nature, however, and McGrath's time in his current post in the Philippines will be ending, making the upcoming competitions his final hurrahs as an assistant coach of the Philippine national team. Any half-serious consideration he'd given to sticking around and taking a run at this whole coaching thing took a serious blow, too, when he floated the idea to one of his toughest and most honest critics. "I was talking to my son – he's four – the other day, and I said, 'I think I'm going to quit work and become a hockey coach,' " McGrath said. "And my son is like, 'Don't do that, Daddy. That's a terrible idea.' "

But now that the fire has been ignited, McGrath said he'll have a tough time closing this chapter. "Going forward in my next posting, I think I have to ask for somewhere near a hockey rink," he said, "because this has really been the coolest experience of my life." H

HIS CUP OVERFLOWETH

McGrath says his time coaching in the Philippines "has been the coolest experience of my life."

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The Hockey News

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Vol. 50 / Issue 41

SEPTEMBER 5, 1997

GRATTON-GATE

Lightning likes what it got in trade No. 2

BY TIM BUCKLEY

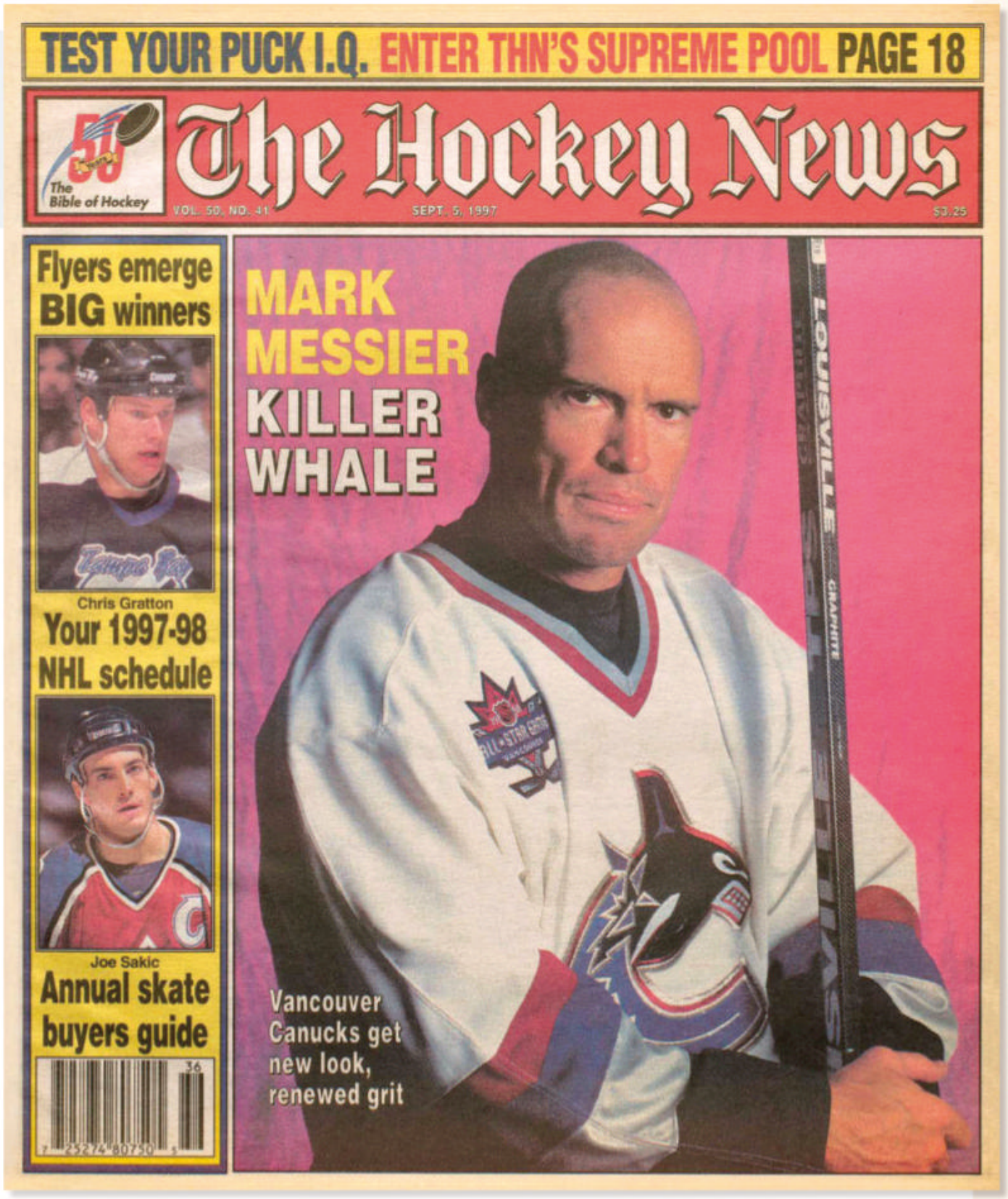
IT DIDN'T WIN THE initial battle, but the Tampa Bay Lightning says it's pleased with what it salvaged in the Chris Gratton affair.

After opting not to match the five-year, $16.5-million offer sheet Gratton signed with the Philadelphia Flyers, (which included a signing bonus of $9 million for 1997-98), Tampa sent the compensatory four first-round picks back to the Flyers in exchange for right winger Mikael Renberg and defenseman Karl Dykhuis. Both players are 25.

"(They) are legitimate NHLers who played on a Stanley Cup finalist," said GM Phil Esposito.

The deal was the second – but only the first official – in a week for Esposito, who believed he had completed a trade with the Chicago Blackhawks Aug. 20 in which the Lightning would have reportedly received defenseman Keith Carney, left winger Ethan Moreau, $2 million and draft picks for the rights to Gratton.

Said coach Terry Crisp about deal No. 2: "Before we go doom and gloom…let's realize we still have a good club."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VOL. 50, NO. 41
SEPT. 5, 1997
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Flyers emerge BIG winners
Chris Gratton
Your 1997-98 NHL schedule
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MARK MESSIER KILLER WHALE
Vancouver Canucks get new look, renewed grit

Renberg had 38 goals and 82 points in his rookie NHL season, but he recorded just 49 goals while fighting through injuries the past two seasons. Renberg says he is fully recovered from an abdominal muscle tear that required surgery in 1996. "Maybe this is a new start for me," he said.

Dykhuis became expendable when the Flyers picked up free agent Luke Richardson earlier this summer.

Getting the fax straight

The tangled Chris Gratton affair took many twists and turns. Here is a timeline of events.

Aug. 12, noon: Tampa Bay Lightning GM Phil Esposito has trade talks with several teams after learning Gratton is close to signing offer sheet.

Aug. 12, early evening: NHL commissioner Gary Bettman rejects trade between Tampa Bay and Chicago Blackhawks because the deal gives perception Gratton is being sold for cash ($5.5 million).

Aug. 12, 9:45 p.m.: Lightning and Blackhawks begin unsuccessful attempts to notify league of new trade and eventually leave message.

Aug. 12, 10:03 p.m.: Gratton's signed offer sheet from Philadelphia Flyers faxed to Lightning.

NHL TEAM REPORTS

Gratton-Gate

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By Tim Buckley

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NOTEBOOK: Center **John Cullen** completed chemotherapy treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma earlier than expected and is expected to report to training camp...Disgruntled right winger **Dino Ciccarelli** asked for a trade, as expected, and said he may not report to camp. Ciccarelli is looking to renegotiate his contract...Left winger **Patrick Poulin** signed a three-year, $2.1-million contract July 23...With the Michael family out of the running to purchase the Lightning because its bid came up short, Lightning president **Steve Ott** met with prospective buyer **David Refkosar** of Atlanta.

Power forward Chris Gratton makes the already giant-sized Flyers even more intimidating.

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Aug. 12, 10:03 p.m.: Gratton's signed offer sheet from Philadelphia Flyers faxed to Lightning.

Aug. 12, shortly after 10 p.m.: Tampa and Chicago verify trade with NHL official.

Aug. 13: Lightning claims Philadelphia fax illegible and, therefore, invalid.

Aug. 15: Arbitrator John Sands rules Flyer fax valid after 90-minute hearing on the previous day.

Aug. 16: League schedules hearing for Aug. 18 on which came first – consummation of trade or Flyer fax.

Aug. 19: Bettman rules "Tampa Bay and Chicago just ran out of time. All the terms of the trade and contracts must be reviewed before it is consummated. Merely leaving a message...is not the defining moment."

Aug. 20: Tampa declines to match offer, but strikes deal in which compensatory four first-round picks go back to Flyers for right winger Mikael Renberg and defenseman Karl Dykhuis.

Flyers make sizeable gains with pick-ups

By Wayne Fish

Bob Clarke believes size matters.

That's why the Philadelphia Flyers' GM chose to make the NHL's biggest team even bigger with the acquisition of 22-year-old power forward Chris Gratton.

Clarke signed Gratton to a five-year, $16.5-million offer sheet, then dealt right winger Mikael Renberg and defenseman Karl Dykhuis to the Tampa Bay Lightning to re-acquire the compensatory four first round picks the Lightning received when it decided not to match.

Gratton, 6-foot-4 and 218 pounds, was one of only two players (Phoenix Coyotes captain Keith Tkachuk was the other) to register at least 30 goals (30) and 200 penalty minutes (201) last season.

"We really like Gratton...the future for him is bright," said Clarke, who earlier in the summer added another 6-foot-4 player, free agent defenseman Luke Richardson.

Sophomore Dainius Zubrus now gets an unfettered opportunity to replace Renberg on the Eric Lindros-John LeClair 'Legion of Doom' line, while Gratton, Rod Brind'Amour and Vaclav Prospal are likely to make up a formidable second unit.

"We're clearly adding big guys who are definitely not afraid of physical play," Zubrus said. "That's the personality of our team."

Gratton sounds eager to join a situation that looks like a perfect fit.

"They're definitely the toughest team in the league to play against," Gratton said. "When that offer sheet came over from Mr. Clarke, there was no hesitation on our part."

Murray feels 'burned' by NHL after losing out on Gratton

By Tim Sassone

The season hasn't even started and already the Chicago Blackhawks have one in the loss column.

Commissioner Gary Bettman ruled an Aug. 12 trade that would have brought Chris Gratton's rights to the Blackhawks from Tampa Bay was completed after Philadelphia had tendered an offer sheet for the 22-year-old center.

The Hawks and Lightning believed they had completed a deal earlier in the day, but Bettman rejected it because it involved $5.5 million and gave the perception Gratton was being sold. There were hard feelings by the Hawks toward Bettman. "I got burned here," said Hawks' GM Bob Murray.

Murray also claimed Pat Morris, Gratton's agent, lied after thinking a three-year contract for Gratton had been agreed upon early in the afternoon Aug. 12. Murray said Morris never called him back, which delayed finalizing the trade with Tampa.

Morris and Bettman said the Hawks could have seized control of the situation by signing Gratton to an offer sheet.

Murray said the Hawks won't forget what happened. "From now on," he said, "the Chicago Blackhawks are just going to have to look out for themselves."

NOTEBOOK: Right winger **Tony Amonte** was thrilled to remain a Hawk after signing a five-year, $15-million contract July 29. "Nothing could take me from this city," he said...Defenseman **Steve Smith** retired Aug. 15 to take a coaching job with Calgary...The Hawks traded defenseman **Enrico Ciccone** to Carolina for defense prospect **Ryan Bloshuer** and a fifth round pick July 25.

Murray feels 'burned' by NHL after losing out on Gratton

BY TIM SASSONE

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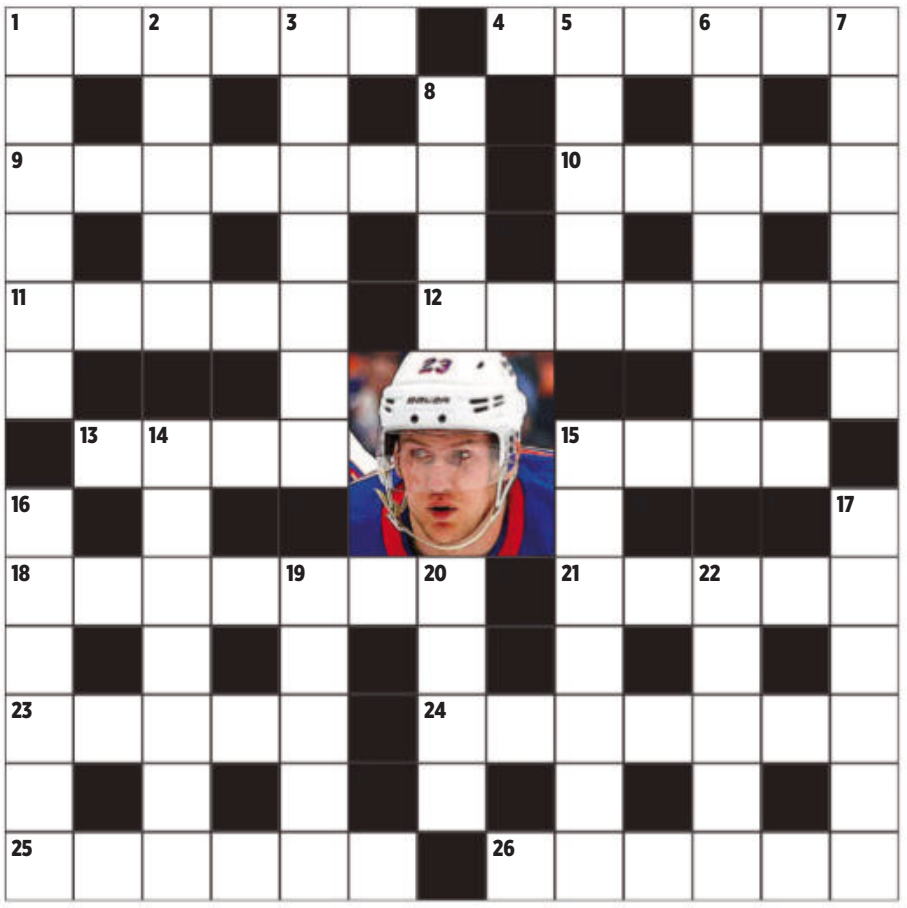
The Hockey News

CROSSWORD

BY LARRY HUMBER



ACROSS

1 The 2023 Cup winners (with 24 Across)
4 Lauzon, a steady blueliner in Nashville
9 Former Oilers 'D' now wearing 'A' in Seattle
10 He will step behind the Senators' bench in 2024-25 after stints with Canucks and Devils
11 Give out
12 The Avs once considered the name Rocky Mountain ___
13 'Boomer' won four Cups with the '60s Leafs
15 Canadian Amateur Hockey Association: abbr.
18 Scoring opportunities
21 Given name of Dallas Stars' 'Ace of Spades'
23 Reggie 'The ___' Leach
24 See 1 Across
25 The Wells Fargo Center is also home to this NBA team
26 Comes to terms on a deal

DOWN

1 ___ Hawn's son Wyatt played college hockey in Alabama
2 The Jersey ___ were once an EHL team
3 The E in EHL
5 'Ovi' is also known as 'The Great ___'
6 Home of the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame
7 Pulled
8 Joint susceptible to injury (ask Bobby Orr)
14 Rangers D-man from Jericho, N.Y., pictured
15 Another sport played on ice
16 Puts the biscuit in the basket
17 NHL's mid-aughts U.S. broadcast network
19 Unmarked, in the ___
20 Maenalanen, a former Hurricane and Jet
22 Current Caps winger and Warroad High alum

Hockey TRIVIA

> BEGINNER:
The player above, the No. 1 pick in the 2024 PWHL draft, is "new" to pro hockey this year, despite owning three world titles and an Olympic gold. Who is she?

> INTERMEDIATE:
Nobody in NHL history was the new guy more often than this player, whose 17-year big-league career saw him skate for 12 different clubs. What is his name?

> EXPERT:
Which coach forced the NHL to adopt many new *rules* – like the one barring a goalie from leaving his stick in net when pulled – in response to his cheeky tactics?

Word SEARCH

The 'Finnish Flash' leads the list of top the top 10 Suomi producers in NHL history

All-Time Top-Scoring Finns

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S	B	D	A	N	E	N	I	M	M	U	N	X	U	Z
H	G	J	C	E	R	J	R	M	U	R	G	V	B	I
O	T	W	K	P	L	A	Q	X	O	V	C	S	H	B
C	Q	H	P	V	N	Y	N	G	D	N	I	Y	K	J
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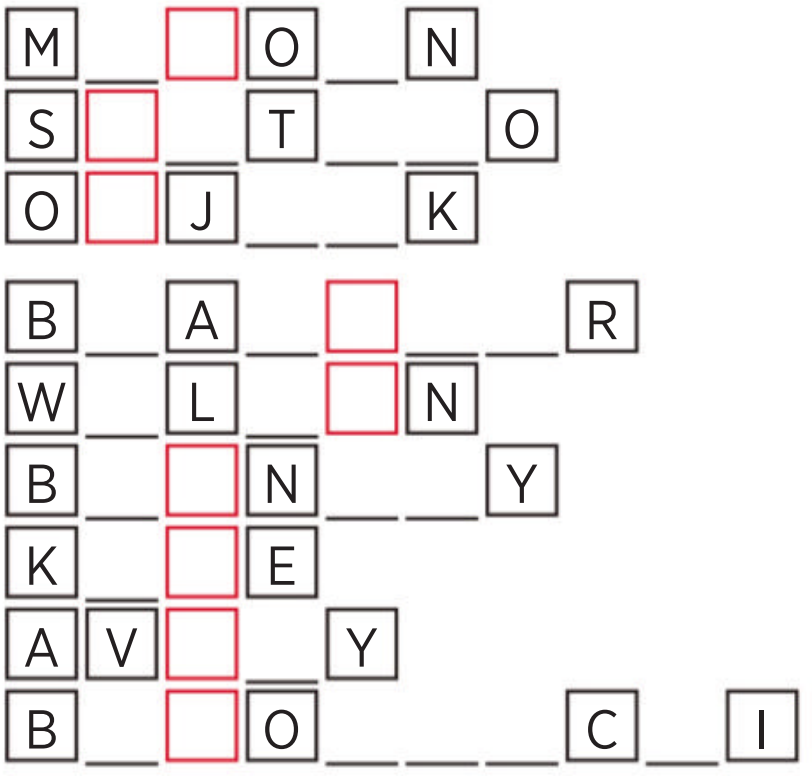
SELANNE
KURRI
S. KOIVU
JOKINEN
BARKOV
M. KOIVU
NUMMINEN
TIKKANEN
RANTANEN
TIMONEN

PUCK PUZZLE

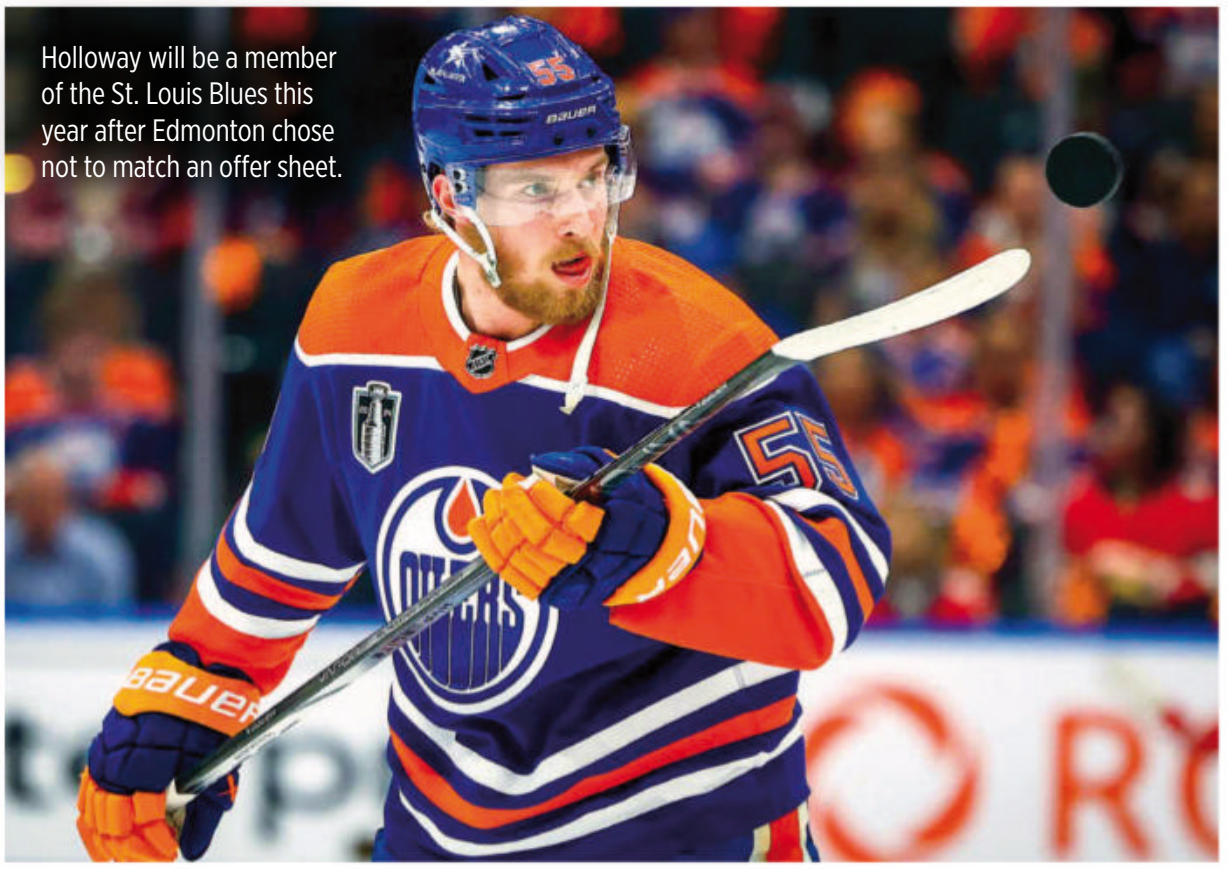
Can your hockey brain bring its A-game? The challenge is on!

Here are nine single-season penalty-minute leaders since 1995-96. Fill in the blanks and the name of the HHOFer who, starting in 1932-33, led the league in PIM in five straight seasons and in seven of eight will appear in the red boxes.



CROSSWORD: PERRY NELSON-USA TODAY SPORTS; TRIVIA: STEPHEN R. SYLVANIE-USA TODAY SPORTS

CROSSWORD SOLUTION: ACROSS 1. GOLDEN, 4. JEREMY, 9. LARSSON, 10. GREEN, 11. ISSUE, 12. EXTREME, 13. BAUN, 15. CAHA, 18. CHANCES, 21. ROOPE, 23. RIFLE, 24. KNIGHTS, 25. SIXERS, 26. AGREES
DOWN 1. GOLDIE, 2. LARKS, 3. EASTERN, 5. EIGHT, 6. EVELETH, 7. YANKED, 8. KNEE, 14. ADAM FOX, 15. CURLING, 16. SCORES, 17. VERSUS, 19. CLEAR, 20. SAKU, 22. OSHIE
TRIVIA ANSWERS: SARAH FILLIER, MIKE SILLINGER, ROGER NELSON **PUCK PUZZLE SOLUTION:** MARONN, SESTITO, ODJICK, BRASHEAR, WILSON, BARNABY, KANE, AVERY, BOROWIECKI (FINAL ANSWER: RED HORNER)



Holloway will be a member of the St. Louis Blues this year after Edmonton chose not to match an offer sheet.

ST. LOUIS BLUES

AN OFFER THEY CAN'T REFUSE

Tendering an offer sheet to another team's player is one of the last taboos in the NHL. But the Blues' bold bid on two young Oilers shows that the times are a-changin'

IF THERE'S ONE MANTRA to take away from the shocking double offer sheet the St. Louis Blues foisted upon the Edmonton Oilers in August, it's probably this: no hard feelings. This was not a matter of the Blues seeking revenge for a past slight or previous offer sheet, and St. Louis GM Doug Armstrong made it clear it had nothing to do with the fact his good friend Ken Holland was no longer GM in Edmonton.

In fact, Armstrong got off one of the greatest lines in recent hockey history when he claimed that he would offer-sheet any team, no matter who was in charge – even if his own mother was the GM. (But how does she feel about the analytics movement?)

Offer sheets are one of the last taboos in the NHL, right up there with stepping on the logo in the dressing room – just put it on the ceiling! – or talking about a shutout before the final buzzer has sounded. When the Blues used the maneuver to wrest defenseman Philip Broberg and left winger Dylan Holloway from the Oilers, it was only the second time in NHL history that two players were offer-sheeted by and from the same team. (Coincidentally, it was St. Louis who was victimized in the first case, losing Dave Thomlinson and Glen Featherstone to Boston in 1991.) Heck, it was the first time since 2021 *any* offer sheet had been signed. The previous instance was by Carolina for Montreal's Jesperi Kotkaniemi, in what felt like retaliation after the Habs tried to steal away center Sebastian Aho with an offer sheet two summers before.

> IF THE BLUES CASH IN ON BOTH PLAYERS, **WE MIGHT SEE A FEW MORE OFFER SHEETS IN THE FUTURE**

The Broberg-Holloway gambit was not retaliatory. In fact, it made sense, as the Blues forced Edmonton's hand into making the tough decision to lose two promising players in their early 20s due to a cap crunch. And the bigger picture in Edmonton is that a team that went to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup final last season would prefer to have some financial wiggle room to add a veteran 'D' at some point this season.

New Oilers GM Stan Bowman didn't seem personally offended by Armstrong's move, and he certainly didn't challenge him to a barn fight, as we had seen with offer sheets of yesteryear. But perhaps there is a lesson for all NHL GMs out there, which is this: don't get caught napping in the summer.

While I'm not accusing the Oilers of this specifically, it's worth noting the Blues couldn't have offer-sheeted Broberg or Holloway if they'd already been signed to new deals. Instead, negotiations for both RFAs had dragged into mid-August, which meant agents were getting restless and other teams began to arrive as suitors.

The salary cap has had a monumental impact on how NHL teams are built, and even with the ceiling going up recently, contenders will continue to crunch those numbers down to the last decimal to make sure they have the best roster allowed under the CBA. We all love the beginning of free agency on July 1, but the focus is so much on the drag race for unrestricted free agents that new deals for the RFAs typically come later.

The Broberg-Holloway situation should put other teams on notice, and while it's not always straightforward to offer-sheet someone – they have to want it, and you need specific draft picks available for compensation if they say yes – teams are clearly aware it's an option. In fact, the Blues had to make a trade prior to the offer sheet to get back one of their draft picks that had previously been dealt away. I don't know if that random deal made any antennae shoot up across the NHL, but I know I'm going to pay attention from now on if it happens.

Now, we wait for the season to unfold to see the results. I was impressed with how Broberg played in the Cup final, albeit in a limited role. He appears to be on the cusp of becoming a top-four defender. In Holloway, the Blues get a burgeoning power forward with size and mobility. It often takes a little more time to make an NHL impact when you're no longer bigger than most of your peers, but Holloway seems to be at that tipping point. If the Blues cash in on both players, then St. Louis will have two more youngsters to add to an enviable and continually growing core. And we might see a few more offer sheets in the future. H

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